

# Gray Mist

By the Author of  
The Martyrdom  
of an Empress.



*Eva Hamath*

*A.P. 24*  
*150*

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THE ROAD TO THE PARDON

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# GRAY MIST

A NOVEL

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[Conliffe-Loven, Marguerite]

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"THE MARTYRDOM OF AN EMPRESS"

OFFICIER DE L'ORDRE DE L'INSTRUCTION PUBLIQUE DE FRANCE



ILLUSTRATED WITH WATER-COLOR DRAWINGS  
BY THE AUTHOR

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## ILLUSTRATIONS

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# GRAY MIST





## ARMORICA FIDES

GRAY land of gorse and granite, to my thought  
Thou risest ever in a breath divine,  
Fragrance of violets in sea-weed caught,  
Peat-smoke and heather, and the scent of pine.

Cornouaille and Treguier, Carcanet, Bro-Varoch,  
Domnonée, Léon,—oh, to dwell in these  
Thine ancient kingdoms, menhir-crowned, that mock  
The age-long thunder of Hesperian seas!

To list the bigniou, hear the saulniers sing,  
To glimpse at evening from the falaise high  
The red-sailed fishers, homing wing and wing,  
Coals on the umbered orange of the sky!

White coiffes and laughter on the moonlit pier,  
The market wrangle long ere prime is rung,  
Harsh Breton speech, yet sweeter to mine ear  
Than smoothest syllables of an alien tongue!

Foredone with toil and struggle, I would rest,  
Yet from forgetfulness debarred am I,  
Thou kill'st me with desire, yet from thy breast  
Thou gav'st the stubborn strength that will not die.

Though all night long the heart with heimweh grieves,  
Though in the dawning, visioned sleeplessly,  
The wave-like clamor of the gusty eaves  
Stabs with fierce longing for thy wind and sea.

Is the day bright, my heart doth whisper low,  
" 'Tis misty there!" and in the noonday blaze  
When shrills the locust, "Surely thou must know  
"In our own land there are no parching days!"

If the clouds gather, "Ah!" it saith to me,  
"How storms in Finisterre the autumn rain!"  
If snow, "There is no snow in Brittany!"  
Thus every lingering hour is linked with pain.

O Celtic Mother, nothing will avail—  
Still shall thy blood-bonds gall a willing slave,  
And grant no freedom, till the straining sail  
Rise thy cliff ramparts from the eastern wave!

M. M.

#### AUTHOR'S NOTE.

THE principal incident in the following story is based upon actual fact, that came within the scope of the writer's personal observation.

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## CHAPTER I

In the gray mist we blindly steer  
With hearts a-strain, and eyes that peer  
Naught but the ghostly wave to spy,  
Upheaving through the smother high,  
Or breathless deeps descending sheer.

And Silence poiseth darkly near  
Broad-winged, or other phantoms drear  
With shriek, and groan, and prayer go by,  
In the gray mist.

Long toil, and niggard gleams of cheer  
Glimpsed from a far-off sun and clear,  
Ere the cloud knitteth sea and sky!  
Lord, may thy harbor-lights be nigh,  
When looms the iron Coast of Fear  
In the gray mist!

M. M.

*"Ni zo bepred Bretoned—Bretoned, tud Kaled."*<sup>1</sup>

THE sea was utterly still, slowly breathing with the slowly rising tide which idly and almost imperceptibly lifted the long, brown ribbon-weeds clothing the *Melle-zouriou-Du* reefs. Between their broad, flat streamers the feathery patterns of many pale-green, delicate mauve,

<sup>1</sup>"We are Bretons always, Bretons of strong and faithful race."

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and faintly rose-tinted fronds floated out, and lay like the rich designs of some antique brocade on the satiny surface, softly veiled by the silvery fleeciness of a truly Breton mist.

Up and down the hazy coast-line other groups of sentinel-like rocks still projected their dark, wicked crests, but in a little while they too would treacherously disappear beneath the soft wash of the shore-bound water. Meanwhile, the mist seemed bent on enveloping the whole wide world—not blowing up from anywhere in particular, but simply evoked somehow by every silent aspiration of the ocean, intensifying a thousandfold the unusual calm of that great, dangerous Bay, the entire floor of which is grimly paved at unfathomable depths with the bleaching bones of drowned men, and the skeletons of shattered boats.

Far out beyond the dulled shadow of the rocks a dark object—larger than any Northern sea-bird—was gently drifting. The exquisite dream-light within the heart of the fog, poured broadly about in soft diffusion through floating whorls of vapor, defined clearly upon the slightly crinkled surface a rumpled plaque of nut-brown *belinge*—a buoyant raft of wide-spread petticoats in the midst of which smiled a dimpled baby face, merry, rosy, and unafraid. Mist-drops hung to the dark eyelashes and to the fluffy golden curls escaping from the prim bondage of a crimson Breton *biggin* stoutly tied beneath the fat chin, and two pudgy, pink-palmed hands beat the rippling water like paddles.

Somewhere, very, very far above this floating mite, the pale sun was doubtless shining fitfully, for just then a curious radiance, penetrating even those folds upon folds of pearly clouds, pailletted a sea of burnished steel with millions of tiny silver disks—a spectacle that filled

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the big, gray eyes watching it with delight, and the tiny palms with extreme eagerness to seize at least a few of those twinkling platelets!

Born and bred on the very lip of the great Atlantic, this little fellow had no fear of it even in its angriest moods, so why should he now be alarmed by the caressing touch of that mellow water, so maternally upholding him amid a delicious shimmer of interwoven lights? At two years old the strangest happenings seem quite natural, and when awakening from a long, luxurious nap curled up in the bottom of his father's *kinàu*, he had accepted his position as a captive snatched from the sands by the out-going tide quite as a matter of course. How could he know that the square, keelless little box, meant solely to carry the sardine-baskets from the anchored *sinagots* to the wharf of the little fishing-village now many miles away, was at best a tipsy craft, or that his careless young nurse had doomed him to an almost certain death when she had let herself be distracted by some foolery or other from her duties as guardian of his slumbers? No! So far the tiny mariner was entirely satisfied.

A flicker of beating wings suddenly flecking the fog with the whiteness of snow, and noisily stooping and settling upon the face of the waters hard by, had made him crow with joy, and rising unsteadily to his yet uncertain feet, he had grasped at the edge of the little *kinàu*, bending forward with all his might to clutch at the silky pinions of those tantalizing gulls, playing hide-and-seek with him amid the gauzy coils of mist. Why did they break and scatter so at sight of him, stupid things? Vainly reaching out for them he had stretched his plump little body across the narrow rim, and in another moment, without the least shock, the tricky shell

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had dipped and filled like a teacup, sending its occupant adrift upon his wellnigh unsoakable homespun petticoats, while a cloud of startled birds, springing upward, vanished with ear-piercing screeches of dismay into the depths of the vapor-swathed sky.

"Oh-o-o-o-o-h!" the little fellow shouted after them in indignant protest at so much unfriendliness, his angry struggles and kickings momentarily submerging more and more of the trusty *belinge*, thus perilously hastening his own final exit from the scene.

Fortunately for him, however, at that very minute the blanket of fog was torn apart to make room for transparencies of silvered rose, through which loomed with the indistinctness of a vision, a cautiously-advancing fishing-boat. This sort of weather — *le grand calme blanc*—is what the men of the sardine-fleet dread most, because in the white wedlock of sea and sky distance and sound are alike abolished, so that the most watchful may meet the fate of the unwary upon the murderous rocks of the Bay. Slowly the deep-laden *sinagot* advanced, shearing the pale, iridescent sea—which would have seemed so absolutely like a lake had it not been for the pure, unmistakable breath of the ocean pulsating all around—and suddenly a hoarse, frightened voice cried out: "Give way! For the Blessed Virgin's sake, give way!"

Two strides over the silver-and-opaline shimmer of the full sardine-baskets brought the master of the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* to the bow, while his second jammed down the helm with an oath of astonishing magnitude!

"What's that! *D'em Zi Rour!* (help)— *D'em Zi Rour Santez Annaik—!*" the barefooted, freckle-faced *mousse* shrieked, crossing himself precipitately, and as the *Patron* swung to starboard and bent far out over the side, for-

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getting for once all respect and discipline, he fairly yelled: "Oh! Don't touch it—*Tec'h* (take care)—let *Teuss* keep it—*Gwa* (misery)—it's a *Kollidik Apouliek*!"<sup>1</sup> It'll bring us all bad luck!"

Wholly unmindful of this sinister warning and of the half-muttered protests of the rest of his crew, Hervé Rouzik, growling, "You half-weaned calf, who's asking you the time of day?" seized his opportunity, made a swift downward plunge, a quick recover, and in another moment the bronzed and muscular *équipage* were retreating aft from the utterly confounding spectacle of a lively baby laughing and crowing to them from within the shelter of the *Patron's* arms, and not one whit more alarmed by the stern faces and great statures of these strapping giants of the sea, than he had been by the lonely immensity of the sea itself.

"Feel of it, Hervé? Is the *paotrik* (little chap) real? Lock out *en hâno ar Speredz*!"<sup>2</sup> they chorussed in tones ranging from superstitious distrust to downright alarm!

"Real?" Hervé cried, turning the bright little face up to his own. "*Aoutrou* (Lord!) I should think so! Come and see for yourselves, you fools!"

There was a hesitating move for'ard, and a few moments later *Mab-Ab-Koabr* (Son of the Cloud), as they named him on the spot, was enthusiastically accepted as a member of the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor's* crew.

Hervé Rouzik was a typical Breton, possessed of splendid strength both moral and physical. He was loyal, straightforward, and handsome, with deep-set eyes that fell before no man, and his heart in the right place—

<sup>1</sup> A "*Kollidik Apouliek*" in Brittany is supposed to be the misbegotten soul of a still-born baby abandoned by God to Satan, who tosses it for sport far out to sea, where it floats in the track of doomed ships.

<sup>2</sup> In the name of the spirits.

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that is, in the keeping of his young wife, who until six months since, before the loss of her first-born, had been the loveliest girl in Kermarioker. This misfortune had shaken even Hervé's robust faith; to his bewildered understanding it was as though the whole fabric of right and justice had suddenly plunged and staggered, and since that never-to-be-forgotten hour he had neither quite comprehended himself nor his surroundings. A miserable foreboding of final disaster never left him, and day and night he trembled for his Lanäik, so wan and pale now, with her mind *égarée*, as he put it in his simple way, and scarcely enough strength left to drag herself about the house. The coming of another child, they told him, alone could save her, but she was far too frail and delicate and broken for such hopes to be entertained, and he felt convinced that soon she would glide from madness to death, leaving him alone and desolate.

His stern eyes filled with tears whenever he thought of the vow she had made to *Saint Yvon de Bretagne*, *Patron de ceux qui s'en vont*, to win his gentle favor so that she might have her little Pierrek back again! With her weak, trembling little hands she had fashioned a boat from one of her Sunday sabots of fine-grained beechwood; for masts she had stripped three furze branches of their thorns; for yard-arms her finest knitting-needles had done duty, and sails of mediæval magnificence she had cut from her most precious possession, her wedding-apron of silver-and-azure brocade! But the rigging—where was she to obtain hemp sufficiently delicate to make that? So she had twisted into fairy-like cordages some of her beautiful golden hair, and affixing the silver cross of her rosary to the prow of the quaintest little vessel ever built, she had carried it barefooted all the way to the Chapelle de Saint Yvon, built far out on a



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rugged buttress of the cliffs above the ever-restless sea, praying aloud as she went for the return of the child whom she always refused to look upon as dead!

That was three months ago, before she had become so helpless—and now!

Hervé glanced almost fearfully at the sturdy, curly-headed little fellow, enthroned upon an overturned fish-basket in the midst of the grinning crew, wrapped cosily in his own vast *cirage*,<sup>1</sup> and responding gleefully to the boisterous advances of the now thoroughly-reassured *mousse* from within the tent-like folds of that huge garment.

“Perhaps it is *Madame la Sainte Vierge* who has sent you a substitute for your little Pierrek, *Patron*,” a voice suddenly muttered at his elbow, and he started guiltily. “Life and Death!” “Death and Life!” he seemed to hear the water murmur as it parted before the blunt prow of his stout *chaloupe*, while his thoughts spun out before his musing eyes an interminable web of hopes and fears far into the clammy heart of the mist, beyond the invisible sea-rim, beyond his sight and saner judgment!

At length his bronzed face, glistening with wet and drawn into deep lines of anxiety, suddenly lighted up, all worry and puzzlement wiped away like writing from a slate, and straightening his broad shoulders he turned with a grunt to his crew. His decision was taken!

Lanäik, meanwhile, sat on her door-step beneath a trailing canopy of white roses that clothed the little four-square granite house with fragrant beauty, her great, blue eyes wandering vacantly about the narrow strip of

<sup>1</sup> “Cirages” are pale-yellow, water-proof pilot-coats, highly waxed and painted, which the fishermen’s wives manufacture very cleverly at home for “those at sea.”

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garden filled with honeysuckle, hollyhocks, and stout bush-like geraniums, which, sheltered by the great blocks of rock topping the sloping shingle beach, grew with a full-fed vigor. Six months ago she had been the happiest girl in Kermarioker, but to-day her arms hung listlessly at her sides, and her thin, haggard, little face showed those lines of anguish that, once drawn, are never quite effaced again.

"She has turned 'innocent'!"—which in Brittany is the equivalent of demented — was the verdict of Kermarioker, and truly the unrelieved melancholy, the stubborn muteness in which she now remained eternally plunged, deserved no other. Little Pierrek's death seemed to have dazed her absolutely, and her youth and beauty were fast disappearing under the erosion of this inconsolable sorrow. Perchance the village matrons were in the right when they whispered to one another that it was a pity Hervé should be well enough off to indulge her in this long-continued apathy. A little wholesome work in the neighboring salt-marshes or even at the *Usine le Pennek* on the lower harbor would have been far more advisable; but then Hervé Rouzik had from the first made of his wife a sort of saint to be humored and worshipped on bended knee in a fashion foreign to rough, granite-bound Brittany, where if husbands do treat their wives with more true respect and old-fashioned decorum than anywhere else in France, they nevertheless expect them to bear their full half share of life's labors and hardships—to be, in one word, helpmates, in the full sense of that proud title.

Absolutely immovable, Lanäik sat for a long time watching the mist twist itself in pearly coils among the stems of her shrubs and plants, once so tenderly cherished, but now only tended at odd moments by Hervé. It was

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on just such another day that her baby had been taken from her—she remembered this with terrible accuracy—and as she listened to the dove-gray water chuckling derisively to itself within the opaquely shimmering depths of the fog, she clinched her thin hands with a sudden grip, for in her poor bruised brain she made it the fault of *la grande gueuse*—as we coast-people call the ocean when it has displeased us—that her little son had gone away!

Breton women, alas! are only too apt to see this heartless *Grande Gueuse* rob them of all they love, and since her husband's father, his uncles, and his three brothers had all been snatched away thus, why not her tiny darling, too? With all her dim thoughts rooted in this crazy logic—crazy, indeed, since the child had died of one of those relentlessly swift infantile maladies that disconcert science and ignorance alike—she stared fiercely seaward, as though bent on piercing to the very verge of that unseen horizon where the Inscrutable Powers are enthroned.

An overwhelming sense of loneliness and desertion seemed to descend upon her from the veiled and pallid sky. Her nerves had suffered with her reason, and the slow ground-swell that presently began to beat against the base of the rocks near by, sounded in her ears like the sobbing of a haunting spirit, yet she was not weeping. Furious resentment stiffened the fibre of her grief, and her only demand was for restitution. "You have robbed me of my son. Give him back to me!" It is the mothers whom God pities, they say in Finisterre. Would the sea, God's greatest work, then remain forever pitiless, and refuse to give her back the little one she mourned?

One sometimes sees in the stubborn, almost human profile of a rock outlined against a wintry sky, such an

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expression of despairing resentment and contemptuous, unyielding hauteur as that into which Lanäik's straight, delicate features had hardened, and yet, had she but known it, the Powers enthroned behind those mysterious, pale-gray veils had even then decreed for her a strange and joyous awakening from her adamantine stupor!

Across the fog-shrouded Bay the fleet of double-winged sardine-boats was making for home. Their gorgeous sails of dusky red, deep orange, and rich umber and wall-flower tints, advanced shadowily but not unheard, for the beautiful minor notes of the sailors' favorite hymn—

“Ar stered hep nivér  
Hadet gañd ar C'hrouer,

“Egiz da vleuniou tân  
Dre volzou an cabl splàn”<sup>1</sup>

were wafted inshore, together with a sharp salt pungency from the piled-up fish-baskets that came with an effect at once of contrast and of kinship upon the steady land perfume, made up of furze and genesta blossoms, green bracken, crushed pine-needles and turf-fire smoke. The sun was setting now. From his veiled presence, indicated by a curiously-tinted glow low down in the intermelting banks of fog, smothered rays crept delicately, enfolding in a translucent silkiness of light the vague looming outline of the many-hued sails, the boulder-studded beach, and the gray houses of Kermarioker, clinging to a break of the frowning cliffs that hid their towering summits in the shrouded sky. Then, as the mellow call of the Angelus began to sound from the tiny

<sup>1</sup> From the *Bombard Kerne*. “The numberless stars sown by God, like flowers of fire on the splendid vault of heaven.”

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church, flanked by its acolyte the many-stepped granite calvary, reality—or what there had seemed to be of it in this vaporous scene — was gone. All was a mirage of mist and sea-voices and drowsy bell-cadences, “the baseless fabric of a vision” that would surely fade and “leave not a wrack behind!”

One boat had separated from the others, and instead of entering the lower harbor was feeling its way towards the rocky foreshore above which Lanäik's cottage was poised like a sea-swallow's nest. The *équipage*—all fine types of men in their blue jerseys and red belts and *berets*—moving quite easily in spite of their long sabot-boots and thick woollen trousers, were beginning to haul down the sails, while the *mousse* handled the lapis-lazuli blue nets, which in a few swift moments more would hang from the denuded masts amid fringes of golden-brown cork floaters, transforming the *chaloupe* into a quaint, sapphire-winged object as fantastic as any chimeric insect ever born of the imagination.

Noiselessly parting the water the *Stéréden - Ab - Vor* glided on, rounded the point, and finally cast anchor by the out-jutting reef some small distance from the land. For once in his life the thrifty *Patron* had abandoned all thought of being first à *quay* with his sardines, to be met by the usual vociferous inquiries as to their number, and proposals of purchase from the narrow thresholds of the buyers' *guérites*. All spirit of traffic was gone from him, and leaving his crew to do as they thought fit with his fine catch—they were happily good men and true—he was soon scaling the slippery rocks covered with great peruques of sea-weed, carrying with man-like awkwardness and sailor-like security a burden which he would not have exchanged for a thousand such boat-loads as he was leaving behind him.

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From her door-step Lanäik saw his vague contours grow gradually more defined, but thanks to the refraction of the fog he seemed bizarrely huge and uncouth against the lucent background of sky and sea, where the shadowy net-draped silhouette of the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* trembled faintly like some extravagant moth with wet gossamer wings.

Suddenly the watching woman pressed her hand to her side, as if pierced by acute physical pain. Her head was stretched forward, and her widely-dilated eyes looked, and looked, and looked, while the azure veins beneath the ivory-tinted skin of her temples beat like tiny hammers. She knew her man now . . . but what was that that he carried so precious in his strong arms . . . and why this unheard-of apparition of the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* so far from her anchorage . . . ?

"Hoärvé!" she cried, in a strangled voice. . . . "Hoärvé!" Then with a strange, gasping shriek she shook off her sabots, cleared the low garden wall at one bound, her weakness and illness things forgotten, tore herself clear from the clinging ivy, and honeysuckle trailing on the top, and flew to meet him, threading unerringly between the huddled boulders and drenching her slim, stockinged feet in the shallow pools left behind by the last tide.

The husband striding towards her, his tanned face stern and set, his heart beating with keen misgivings at his rashness, quickened his pace in alarm, and when she fell sobbing and laughing at his feet, with arms wide outstretched towards the child, he lifted her up almost before she touched the ground, and carried both her and the now thoroughly-terrified baby to the house, bolting the door after him so that none but himself should chance to see her thus.

Hardly had the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* been pulled round to

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the harbor by willing oars, before the news of her marvellous find had spread all over Kermarioker. "You must manage the women," Hervé had said to his faithful crew, "for if Lanäik can be made to believe that this is the little one come back to her from yonder"—pointing to the dim ocean—"all may yet be well with her—otherwise—!" and the unfinished sentence had impressed them more than if he had spoken outright the empty darkness of that future.

The women, strange to say, had fully agreed with the men, and had expressed nothing but love and sympathy and eagerness to help their stricken neighbor—but then Brittany is still *par excellence* the land of miracles! Indeed, even the sourest matrons sincerely approved of the "pious fraud" devised by Hervé and his men, smiling upon the latter with amiable patronage and a frankness that disdained irony. "Don't trouble your silly heads!" they royally chorussed. "Keep your own mouths shut and we will see to the rest. Surely we know what we have to do without being told!" They certainly looked as if they did. It seemed self-evident that these dignified and slightly-contemptuous personalities, these snowy-coiffed towers of strength, needed no rash advice from mere boys standing six foot or more in their bare feet!

Next morning, when the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* had once more disappeared *au large*, as the sailors say, a sheaf of clean-washed sun-rays that had been busily chasing away the last filmy remnants of yesterday's mist, burst into Lanäik's little home, and discovered there a state of affairs for many and many a day foreign to that roof of blue-irised thatch.

On the carved bench within the deep chimney-piece, beside the already bubbling *marmite*, sat a wildly-happy

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young mother, rocking in her arms the baby-boy whom *la grande gueuse* had yielded up to her at last!

Such is the wonderful elasticity of some privileged natures, that Lanäik had somehow managed to catch up the broken threads of her life just where six months before they had been so ruthlessly wrenched asunder, and that without any perceptible shock or even astonishment, since the Breton character has at all times a peculiar leaning towards anything that savors of the supernatural. Throughout the period of intellectual cloudiness following the child's death she had prayed and longed for his return with a passionate longing that dulled every other feeling, and though it might take weeks for her full strength of mind and body to be completely restored to her, yet the transformation, both mental and physical, was already marvellous. Her blue eyes sparkled once more with life, her thin face showed a faint tinge of hawthorn pink, and her laugh was pure mirth and pure music as she danced the little boy on her lap. They were quite alone, those two, the women of Kermarioker, with the innate tact of their race, having dispersed singly and in delighted groups of two and three immediately after offering their heartfelt congratulations. Certainly neither complained of this happy solitude.

The slumberous monotone of the sea filled the little house as it fills the volutes of a shell, and wrought itself into a silence that was golden with soft mother-words and gurgling baby prattle, when Monsieur le Curé, just returned from a visit to a distant part of his large and rugged parish, stopped unobserved at the half-door and peered cautiously in. His keen glance swiftly took in the whole tableau; the hard-beaten earth floor, the great stone fireplace valanced with crimson serge, where sparkled a fire of turf and furze branches, the antique



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clothes-press, *bahut*, and massive table of rich-toned curiously-carven wood, the tall dresser gay with blue-and-green Breton crockery, the decorously shuttered *lit-clos* in the corner, with the clumsy little oaken cradle—once so empty but luxurious now with snowy pillow and soft, scarlet blanket—still gently rocking on the *banc-de-lit*,<sup>1</sup> and last of all—for the poor Curé's mind was just now at odds with itself—the laughing mother and child in the inglenook.

The priest's broad-shouldered form grimly pre-empted the rose-garlanded aperture beneath the narrow lintel. His finely aquiline Celtic features were firm set, and the hot flush of anger which had mounted to the very roots of his thick silvered hair, at the discovery of what he considered the cruel trick played upon Lanäik, had not yet quite faded. Gradually, however, as he looked and listened, the heavy frown relaxed, the bright, steel-hued eyes under their pent-house brows lost their harshness, and something remarkably like the dawning of a smile quivered at the corners of his severe mouth.

He was simple as a child, this typical Breton priest—inclined, perchance, to be a trifle autocratic, as behoooves the shepherds of a people that stands — and, please Heaven, will everlastingly stand—apart from the rest of the world, a people defiant, reserved, and stubborn to an incredible extent, but nevertheless incapable of cowardly evasion, meanness, or disloyalty. He lived their life, bore their hardships, defied, as they did, the sleepless wrath of the sea, and suffered much of their poverty also, since with the obstinacy native to his granite province, he had persistently declined well-merited advancement in his reluctance to abandon them. Of course he was not in-

<sup>1</sup> The broad bench or step in front of the *lit-clos* or cupboard-bed, sometimes part of the bed itself, sometimes a separate piece. The cradle always stands on it at night.

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frequently guilty of the sin of anger, was Monsieur le Recteur, but luckily these outbursts resembled in brevity as well as violence those summer tempests which strew the coast with ruin all the way from Paimbœuf to furthestmost Finisterre, and then after all this quarter-decking masterfulness came swift self-reproach, that necessitated the tactful binding up of all the wounds he had inflicted. So although he was certainly feared by his rough parishioners, as one is always feared who is inclined to be almost as severe with others as he is with himself, his tireless unselfishness and that true tenderness that is invariably the twin-brother of flawless bravery, caused him to be adored even more. But most of all his people loved him for the charm of his simplicity—that simplicity which, childhood once past, only finds a home in very noble souls. In short, Monsieur l'Abbé Kornog, Curé of Kermarioker, belonged to the atmosphere of his beloved land, and was no less a characteristic and racial product than the ancient Breton Saints whom he so greatly revered.

At this moment he wore a sorely perplexed look—the index of a state of mind exceedingly rare with him—as his eyes lingered upon Lanäik and the counterfeit Pierrek. Was this really Lanäik whom he saw before him—Lanäik yesterday suffering with all the passionate depth of a rebellious and as yet untamed nature, and drawing ever nearer to complete madness, even to death itself, in her hopeless despair? Here was no brooding dementia! It was she who was the real changeling as she sat there utterly unconscious of his presence, swinging the heavy baby to and fro upon her knee, a delicate color coming and going in her cheeks, and soft bright meshes of golden hair peeping from the nun-like coiffe pulled a little awry by childish clutching fingers.

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Had he, her spiritual father, her truest and warmest friend, the right to interfere now, to crumble to dust with one word all that newly-found and so greatly-needed joy, to consign this faithful, happy little woman to the darkness and desolation from which she had but just escaped? And yet, on the other hand, all this was the outcome of a lie, a barefaced, abominable lie!

"No! I cannot do it!" he muttered, very low and shamefacedly, with a last angry flash of his intent eyes. "One's conscience is a curious piece of property. The wretched thing has not an ounce of discrimination, for this time I could almost swear that it is in the wrong—although—" For a moment he bowed his head and closed his eyes; then the muscular hands—so tender to the sick, so able with the tiller of a boat or in the management of a sail—that had been clinched upon the edge of the half-door like those of one who wrestles, loosened their grip, while the radiance of a great tenderness suddenly transfigured his strong face.

"*C'est bien!* I'll take the sin upon my own shoulders and do proper penance for it," he muttered again, realizing acutely that pity had conquered and that Lanäik and her treasure were safe from him forever.

## CHAPTER II

Lone on a craggy ness, a broken tower  
Heaped round about with ruin, seemed to be  
Skull to some storm-bleached skeleton of Power  
Dismembered half, and scattered scornfully;  
Hither and yon the huge bones mouldering lay,  
And two black holes 'neath brows of granite gray,  
Whence flashed of yore fierce lights to far away,  
Stared like dead sockets o'er a moaning sea.

M. M.

FIRMLY planted on his strong brown legs, Pierrek, with blazing eyes and frowning brows, was facing Lanäik,<sup>1</sup> who, quiet and gentle, but a little paler than usual, was vainly attempting to point out to him the error of his young ways. Something, however, in her attitude, in the tone of her tenderly chiding voice, awoke that demon of combativeness which lies dormant in every Breton, big or small, and suddenly closing his dimpled fists, he said, very distinctly, in a low, angry voice:

*"Na beûket kèd ac'hanoun!"* (Don't bully me!)

Lanäik fell back a pace in utter consternation, unable almost to believe her ears, for children in queer old Armorica are not in the habit of speaking disrespectfully to their parents, having been spared hitherto any acquaintance with modern improvements and fashions.

"Pierrek!" she cried, in dismay, recoiling yet a whole step more from him, "Pierrek, is it to me you are talking?"

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Lah-nah-eek.

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The pebbly lane was very quiet, behind the little group formed by mother and child. Lanäik's garden, partially shaded by a gnarled and twisted fig-tree with a tendency to lean inland, away from the continual sea-breezes buffeting its broad, leathery leaves, basked in the slanting rays of the declining sun, and not a sound save the curiously faint murmur of the rising tide broke the ominous silence.

Pierrek was looking down now, shamed by the enormity of his crime, and as his *béret* had fallen off, the late afternoon light sparked freely upon a wonderful ripple of hair, cut squarely across the forehead *à la mode du Finistère*, not golden—not red—nor auburn—nor flaxen, either, but of purest living copper, a tint so clear and bright that it would have glinted and gleamed almost as much without the aid of this added glory.

Lanäik, watching him anxiously, made a little hesitating movement towards him, instantly arrested by her sense of duty. She must not relent just yet, she felt, and still her whole heart yearned passionately for the small miscreant in his humbled attitude. The soft hum of bees robbing her flowers on the other side of the ivy-grown garden-wall suddenly overpowered the low dirge of the wavelets, and to give herself countenance, poor Lanäik gazed vaguely at the flying white clouds overhead, her delicate face almost succeeding in becoming severe, the laboriously stern set of her lips giving her expression a momentary self-reliance that set off her refined beauty exceedingly.

The culprit was fully aware that for once he had overstepped what even that lenient little mother would easily pardon, but instead of wheedling his way back into favor, as most children would have done, he stood immovable before her, a slight rise and fall of color on his rounded

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cheeks alone showing the perturbation of his feelings. Again Lanäik was betrayed into making that little hesitating motion of the hands, just as swiftly repressed, but did not offer the assistance of smile or word; standing quite still a yard away from him in a manner peculiarly her own, and suggestive of a certain extraordinarily gentle determination that always aroused her husband's merriment.

It was a humiliating position for a lad of Pierrek's haughty spirit. He was keenly conscious of defeat, and felt, in his childish way, that he, Pierrek, *Mab-Ab-Koabr* (Son of the Cloud), the daring future *mousse*,<sup>1</sup> was just now completely nonplussed by a pair of soft, dark-blue eyes, and the dignified aloofness of two demure red lips, usually so ready to kiss and forgive. With one square-tipped finger he pushed up his lower lip, dragging at it with his white teeth, and distorting his handsome little face into a grimace—very unbecoming, it is true, but indicative of the deepest perturbation, and Lanäik felt that she must laugh.

Stealthily, beneath his black lashes, the little chap glanced at her, frowned, turned his eyes away again, and decided that for once he could find no way out of the difficult situation which he had rashly undertaken. In grave distress he scanned the upper end of the lane that ran in a casual fashion past his pretty home, and then in a way thoroughly characteristic of Brittany, turned off unobtrusively at right angles from the garden-wall to lead nowhere at all, but a solution of the question was not to be found there. Then it was that Lanäik turned upon her darling with something very like real anger in her corn-flower blue eyes.

<sup>1</sup> A fisherman's "boy," apprenticed to the profession.

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"How long are you going to stand there sulking, you wicked little owl?" she asked. "Do you think I have nothing better to do than to await your good pleasure?"

This unusual sternness startled Pierrek. His offence must indeed be greater than he had thought! He wriggled one bare foot uncomfortably in the loose sand of the lane. What was all this about, anyhow . . . just a tiny bit of disobedience—not longer than his own little finger—over which his *Mamm-Mammou*<sup>1</sup> made all this fuss. But then, of course, that was because she hated his going near the boats to watch his opportunity for creeping into one of them, and perhaps, O joy of joys! being carried to the fishing-grounds as a stowaway. Well, and what of that? Wasn't he to be a full-fledged *mousse* in little more than a year, whether his *Mamm-Mammou* liked it or not? The faintest suspicion of a smile hovered for a moment in his downcast eyes, but his small face remained quite expressionless, the curve of his moist red lips meant nothing, and it was with an amazement which fairly robbed her of both speech and action that Lanäik saw him bend quickly forward, touch ground in the most approved sprinter fashion with the tips of his fingers, and, bounding up again like a rubber ball, split the air at a rate of speed which precluded all possibility of successful pursuit.

"The little rascal!" she cried, unable to repress a laugh—the trick had been so neat; "but it's Hoärvé who wouldn't joke if he were here," she added, reflectively, vainly attempting to glean from the scattered remnants of her past indignation a sufficiently respectable number of grievances to place before that worthy mariner by-and-by. "Bah! I'll not say anything about it at all!"

<sup>1</sup> "Mother of Mothers"; pet name used by Breton babies.

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she concluded, turning philosophically upon her heel; and re-entering her fragrant little garden-plot she at once fell to weeding and tidying.

Meanwhile, Pierrek was racing as for dear life towards a very favorite hiding-place of his, and that no less than the tenantless domain of the dead and gone Seigneurs of Kermario.

About a mile farther along the coast, on the summit of the cliffs, and standing back but a short space from their abysmal plunge, a great circuit of ponderous gray walls, broken now and again by stout towers riven in more than one instance by the storms of centuries, still crowns the bold headland of Kermario with the beauty and romance of ruin. The narrow slopes below the walls borrow from the ancient masonry an air of bleakness and sterility, though they are densely carpeted with that thick, short grass of the Breton cliff-edge which turns silver-white during the winter months, like the beard of an aged man, to reassume in early spring the pale-golden tints of a baby's locks, while from its velvety depths rise almost all the year round the fuzzy, faintly-pink tassels of millions of fragrant sea-trefoils. Within the sheltering walls, however, all vestige of barrenness disappears, and few spots on earth can boast a more surprising interlacement of rare shrubs, costly plants, and fine old trees. It is an absolute jungle, created by more than a hundred years of neglect in a park once renowned for its Versailles-like magnificence.

The place is said to be haunted, and there are to-day few men of the coast who would consent to enter the vast enceinte after dark, none perhaps who, even in broad daylight, would so much as approach the gigantic pile of débris that was once one of the proudest sea-fortresses of Finisterre. The great charred blocks of stone still



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show, here and there, half-effaced armorial bearings, and crouching, all enamelled with clinging ivy in the centre of a dishevelled lawn, have a dumb eloquence which none can disregard. No wonder, indeed, that the peasants and fisherfolk of the neighborhood should tell strange tales about that place, for was it not there that the last Marquis de Kermario and his five stalwart sons were besieged for nine days, and finally burned like rats in a trap? It is doubtless quite true that they revisit the ashes of their funeral pyre, wandering at night, blackened by smoke and powder, their rich clothes hanging dismally about their fleshless bones in scorched ribbons and waving tatters, cursing again and again in terrible accents those who destroyed the cradle of their race! One glance at crumbling Kermario would suffice to make the stoutest scoffer credit the ghostly legend!

One person in Kermarioker, and one alone, felt no fear when these aristocratic ghosts were mentioned in awed whispers at the *Veillée*. This was Pierrek Rouzik. Long ago he had discovered a narrow fissure at the base of one of the great towers of the enceinte, through which he could just squeeze his supple little body, and, whenever he could manage to give poor Lanäik the slip, he scampered off, hot-foot, to go and play at "being king"—as he termed it—within the forbidden enclosure. He knew every inch of the ground there, down to the darkest and most overgrown corners, and wandered tirelessly about in search of the precious *Geot-a-âour* (Golden Herb), which surely must flourish on such enchanted ground!

No true Breton can ever quite abandon the idea that this remarkable plant really exists, or that if one sees it shining from afar, like a handful of *louis d'or* in the grass, and succeeds in gathering it with the right hand crossed under the left elbow, saying quickly:

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“*Mar venez Satann, ra'zy pell, en han Sant Hōarvé!*” (If you are of Satan, vanish in St. Hervé's name!)—a sudden and startling comprehension of the languages of the birds of the air, the beasts of the earth, and the fishes of the sea, will be one's exceeding reward! Moreover, a sachet of fine linen filled with *Geot-a-âour* and worn around the neck insures health, wealth, and happiness for years to come! Naturally, all these benefits seemed well worth a little trouble to the adventurous Pierrek, who had made up his mind to find the Golden Herb come what might, little knowing that he would eventually risk life itself in this stubborn quest!

At last he slackened his pace, knowing himself to be safe from pursuit, and, quite devoid of any remorse, began to drink his fill of the fresh salt wind sweeping without hinderance from half across the world. The afternoon was ideally pure and golden, although the dangerous equinoctial storms were not far off, and the sea, lazily furling and unfurling her berylline undulations hundreds of feet below him, seemed a vast, crinkled plain slanting gently to a sky-line of immeasurable distance. Lesser headlands thrust and elbowed their way out from shore as upon a relief map, and midway in the wide prospect, like a drove of prehistoric monsters basking upon the waters, seven islands, furred over with the short, tawny grass that completes their animal aspect, stretched out reptilian tails, or erected manes and crests of quaintly-tinted granite dripping with dazzling sea-slaver. The slender shaft of a light-house, spiring upward from its lonely fang of rock, seemed to dominate this formidable company like the staff of a shepherd.

All this Pierrek took in with an intelligent comprehension far beyond his years, and an almost solemn earnestness, which, however, gave place to instant amusement as

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he suddenly came in sight of a troop of gulls drying their unfolded wings on the sun-bathed grass. They looked extraordinarily peaceful and patriarchal, these clannish, silver-plumaged birds, and at his approach they showed no fear, merely rising from the ground gravely and decorously in the courteous fashion of people making way for a superior, and settling down a few yards farther on in the same order. Evidently the boy was no stranger to them, and since gulls in Brittany are said to live to a very respectable age, this might very well be the same feathered squadron of five years ago, that had bunched and scattered in the gray mist at sight of a rosy-cheeked baby bobbing up and down amid the ripples of their watery domain. With a funny little gesture of familiar greeting, the boy marched on, leaving them to the enjoyment of their sun-bath; climbed over a tall hedge of Christ's-thorn, and breaking once more into a run, escalated the last abrupt rosemary-clad slope. Throwing himself flat on his stomach, he crawled beneath a curtain of blackberry bushes—not without some damage to both his clothes and his hands—and finally wriggled through the rent in the wall-tower into a glorious oasis of rioting verdure.

In that second the ocean was gone, its strong, salty breath, the very rumor of it had vanished! The far-stretching vision of savage rocks, the arid *lande*, the whispering murmur of the still rising tide, were exchanged on this side of the crenellated cincture for a wilderness of rank herbage; a bewildering labyrinth of arborescent fuchsias, myrtles, pomegranates, and laurels, tangled in the vast meshes of an all-embracing net of ground-ivy. Dahlias and chrysanthemums, heliotropes and hydrangeas bloomed everywhere, a little palely, perhaps, from their close sequestration beneath dense overgrowths — but

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thanks to their immunity from either gardeners' shears or pilfering hands, in a profusion that did honor to the soil from which they sprang, and to the world-old masonry that baffled alike the frequent cutting winds and the bitter showers of spindrift.

The old orchard, occupying a south corner, was just then in all its glory. Pears and apples, peaches, plums, and apricots, bore down the branches of the ancient trees, and lay in many-colored windrows of sweetness on the *paquerette* studded turf. Farther on a mouldering pergola crumbled beneath a weight of grapes worthy of Canaan; pale-golden and ruddy-purple bunches gleaming gemlike between the tawny-spotted luxuriance of their classic foliage. Again, a row of gigantic fig-trees spread the sun-flecked shadow of their broad leaves above a miraculous harvest of dead-ripe bronze and green fruit, and as Pierrek reached that spot, he fairly smacked his lips! This would be a *gôûter* after his own heart, devoid of the brininess inherent in all Breton menus, and he laughed between mouthfuls as he thought of the stupidity that prevented the whole village from sharing in this feast of feasts! Running hither and thither he sampled the entire orchard, and it was only when wholly convinced that he could hold no more that he turned his attention to one of his favorite playgrounds—a double line of dismantled hot-houses now wellnigh innocent of glass, but still tenanted by the beauty and fragrance of some superb exotics, perfectly acclimatized in this ideal nook of a frostless coast.

A beautiful, broad-leaved vine, brought at great cost from Madagascar in the long ago, formed his own especial bower. It was so vigorous that it had matted itself across the naked ribs of what had been the central dome, and, beneath its interwoven tendrils, hung with bell-

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shaped blossoms of waxy pink, a whole family of owls had established a squatter sovereignty! All day long these solemn birds sat in the perfumed duskiness, wing to wing upon a transverse bar, their topaz eyes partly closed, their fluffy little horns relaxed, greeting Pierrek when he visited them with a soft shrug of feathers and a sleepy squint that said as plainly as speech could have done: "We don't mind you! Come and make yourself comfortable in the shade with us!" So at least the child understood their attitude, for he had never failed to accept the mute invitation, and to-day, being inclined after his sumptuous meal to keep unusually quiet, he stretched himself luxuriously on a thick mat of salaginella moss, close beneath his hosts' lofty perch, in a mood almost as drowsy as their own.

The afternoon had been hot, and the younger, tenderer tendrils of the vine drooped in a sunlight quite extraordinarily fierce for Brittany. "It should be watered," thought Pierrek. "There's been no rain for so long, the poor plant is dying of thirst!"

Water! It was all very well to talk, but where was he to find some? The conduits of the carven fountains in the neighboring pleasance had long since been choked with drifting sand and mouldering leaves, and the merrily-splashing brook at the bottom of the park, as well as the placid *Nadoz-Aer*<sup>1</sup> lake, girt with weeping-willows, was a great way off! Sorrowfully the little lad, who in his quaint fashion adored flowers and animals of every sort, gazed through his half-closed lids at the parching vine. Then suddenly he jumped up with a pleased exclamation which caused his friends the owls to bristle their sleek feathers angrily. There, within a few feet of his head,

<sup>1</sup> Air-needle—name given to the dragon-fly in Brittany.

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the rusty iron orifice of a water-pipe, set in the crumbling masonry, was staring him in the face—and yes, its jagged lip was certainly damp. Why could he not clear the dirt from it and flood the thirsty ground? In a trice he was at work, prodding and poking with a bit of wood, without, however, creating much impression upon the accumulation impacted firmly at a bend of the pipe, a foot or so within. At length, impatiently throwing down the stick, he thrust in his hand and arm as far as they would go, grappling at the obstruction with nervous fingers. Valiantly indeed did he labor, and at last something did seem to give way. “Ouf! It’s done!” the successful worker cried, beginning to withdraw his arm, wildly curious to see if the imprisoned water would spout forth. But his joy was of short duration, for his elbow, which had slipped in so easily, seemed to have become a fixture, and, strive as he might, he could not free himself.

“*Goa!*<sup>1</sup> The witches have got me at last!” he exclaimed, straining at his already extremely painful arm and gritting his teeth furiously. Anger was at present his only sensation, and such a red wrath of anger that it made him almost totally oblivious of either present hurt or future possibilities, his eyes snapping sparks of gray fire as he wrenched and wrenched again.

All around him the great domain slept in the rays of the mellow September sun. Bees droned above every flower, and birds twittered and sang joyfully on the coping of the lofty walls, where the insidiously-creeping runners of the ivy, that caressed the stone-work to its ruin, hid their abandoned nests of the spring-time.

“I wish I had a knife to cut off my arm!” he panted, again and again, white to the lips now with rage and

<sup>1</sup> A Breton malediction.

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anguish, his shaking voice sounding oddly small and helpless in the cruel stillness. Cold sweat was pouring over his face by this time, for, in spite of his courage and pluck, he was slowly beginning to realize the horrors of his predicament. Would he have to perish of hunger and thirst in this haunted solitude, unseen, unheard, where none would ever dream of searching for him. He gritted his strong little teeth, and, suddenly stretching out his free arm, dashed a tightly-clinched fist through one of the few curving panes of glass still adhering to the broken frame-work close by, bending laboriously down as the pieces tinkled to the ground, and picking up the largest.

"Might not this do for a knife?" was the savage thought that crossed his brain.

\* \* \* \* \*

Monsieur le Recteur, returning home along the cliff-road, from the sick-bed of a parishioner, paused beneath the frowning battlements of Kermario to gaze delightedly at the sunset. "Dreams are the paths that lead to sin!" was one of his favorite adages, and he carefully refrained as a rule from indulging himself in them. Now and again, however, his Celtic imagination overruled this ascetic philosophy, and to-day, as he faced the extraordinary magnificence of that foam-fretted bay, with its long undulations of blue-and-green mackerel tints, its escarped and caverned shores crowned with a fringe of sombre pines against the radiance of the western sky, he slowly took off his broad-leaved hat and fell into the very state of mind he most condemned. He loved his Brittany, did the Abbé Kornog, ardently, jealously, in the past and present, with a passion that desired no change, no so-called "progress," since progress in these days means the upheaval of old faiths and virtues, the destruction of

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passionately-reverenced sanctuaries, the negation of all that is holy and miraculous and deeply Breton.

The aromatic fragrance of the sea filled the air, borne towards him on a soft breeze that rustled through the dainty glisten of pearl-gray dwarf-thistles, brittle as glass, and the juicy, emerald-green samphire stems, tangled and interwoven wherever the grim teeth of the cliff thrust upward through its thin lip of sandy mould. Luxuriously did the excellent Abbé breathe in this elixir of life, his eyes fixed on the distant curve of the ocean where broad bands of rich orange quivered against a Byzantine glory of pale gold, shot with rippling shades of turquoise. Above, the whole heaven was of a tender, infinitely delicate mauve, swept with rose-tinted flames. Truly an orgy of dazzling color in this land of half-tints, hazy skies, and silvery vapors.

Very slowly the intense brightness of sea and sky retreated before the stealthy advance of a soft-footed violet gloaming. The low chant of the waves took on a deeper, more sonorous note, as the fulness of the tide, once more victorious, swept over her reconquered domain, lifting the drooping algæ on her heaving shoulders, and spreading abroad the supple ribbons of the weeds that for six hours had lain supine against the granite of the reefs. Then one solitary star, pale still from the effort of awakening, rose above the tragic profile of Cape Toën-Vôr, quivered listlessly for a while, and, seeing that the night would be good to look upon, began to shed her steady magnificence athwart the fading splendors of the vanished sun.

The good Curé suddenly awoke to the gathering twilight. "*Ni ho salud, Stéréden-Vor,*"<sup>1</sup> he hurriedly mur-

<sup>1</sup> "I greet thee, Star of the Sea!" Breton translation of the hymn "*Ave Maria Stella.*"



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mured, crossing himself and bowing his head as in greeting, a little ashamed of having been caught napping, even by this silent and friendly witness. He turned to go, but beyond the massive ramparts at his back the nightingales began to sing, first one, then another, and, quite unable to tear himself away, he lingered a few minutes longer, though the distant clang of the Angelus was already calling him reproachfully to account. And then, overpowering completely the delicious concert of the birds, came an inarticulate cry, ceasing, and recommencing more violently, to die finally away in lugubrious echoes along the ivy-bowered sweep of wall. With a gasp of astonishment, the Curé turned to stare in the direction of this sinister sound. Once again in his long experience he had stumbled unexpectedly upon the human element—ever lurking amid poetic shadows to drag us roughly down to earth. Though amazed, for he well knew that no member of his flock would hazard a step beyond the rusty gates of Kermario, the Curé wasted no time in speculation, but set off immediately at a run towards the nearest entrance, a small postern-door partly overhung with trailing greenery, the key of which never left him, for, like Pierrek, he loved the great silent domain, and feared not at all the wandering *manes* of the heroic nobles murdered there so long ago.

Again and again as he ran he heard the extraordinary cry, every repetition of which lent wings to his haste, but when, after letting himself into the dusky park, he paused for breath an instant, the faint rustle of leaves overhead, and the gentle gurgle of the brook speeding from the lake, alone greeted him. Silent and motionless he stood there, a gaunt black shadow, scarcely staining the now fast-gathering gloom—so silent and so still, indeed, that it might have been the shade of the dead Marquis himself.

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The semidarkness beneath the trees contrasting sharply with the warm afterglow of the sunset outside the walls, warned him to begin his search at once; so, slowly, and with instinctively outstretched hands, he started forward again. Floating *fls de la Vierge* broke across his high-bridged, domineering nose, and he impatiently brushed away the clinging fibres, stopping every few steps to listen for the guiding cry.

At last he heard it once more, rising and falling quite close this time, a harsh, grating yell, more of rage than of pain, which literally tore his ears with its piercing note of savage and exasperated defiance. "It's Pierrek!" cried the priest, as with renewed agility he bounded up the moss-grown steps leading from terrace to terrace. "No one on earth would dare to come here—or be capable of making such a noise!" Making straight for the sound, he crashed through a thick, horn-beam hedge reinforced by clinging ropes of honeysuckle as if it had been mere paper—his powerful shoulders leaving behind them a hole that might have let in a small cart—and found himself on the western esplanade in what remained of sunset brightness. Every object in sight was veiled with that exquisitely delicate evening sea-mist, which at moonrise brightens into sheer diamond-dust, and to the right, above the mounded crests of shrubbery, rose the skeleton structure of the hot-houses, transformed into an aerial fairy fabric, wherein all the lingering remnants of daylight seemed imprisoned. In four strides the Abbé Kornog reached the verdure-garlanded entrance, a yard or two within which the half-kneeling, half-crouching form of Pierrek confronted him. The rosy brown of the child's face had faded to an ashy gray, the puckered forehead was clammy with a sweat that was not of exertion, but the bold eyes were quite tearless, and glittered

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merely with anger—such an anger as one may only see sparkling through those of a trapped wild animal.

The priest gave a short gasp as he caught sight of the blood-stained arm held fast in the masonry, but repressing at once all further sign of emotion, he said, quietly, to the now almost uncannily-silent boy, still obstinately wrenching at his imprisoned limb:

“Don’t move, Pierrek, you are only making matters worse by struggling.”

Much to M. Kornog’s surprise and inward gratification, he was instantly obeyed, though not a word of explanation or complaint passed the twisted, whitened lips. This whiteness, and a continuous twitching of the dark eyebrows, which in no way affected the lids, expressed a quality of courage which brought a lump in the Curé’s throat, and made it a hard task for him to press unhesitating fingers upon the bruised and swollen flesh.

This short examination sufficed to convince him that the situation was indeed a grave one. It seemed at first sight as if nothing short of demolishing the wall and cutting through the rusty pipe could free the little victim, thanks to the complete wedging of the elbow-joint, and at the thought his strong face turned as livid as Pierrek’s own. Then came the “second thought” of a resourceful and experienced man well used to difficult moments, suggesting a narrow chance, and after a moment’s reflection he said, in the same steady, admirably-controlled voice:

“Oil is the only thing that will make your arm slip out, Pierrek, and I must leave you for a short while to go and get some. . . . Will you . . . will you mind that?” he concluded, a trifle more lamely, for in his innermost heart there was rising a dread of seeing this unnatural self-repression break down just when there was so little time to lose.

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Pierrek nodded acquiescence—clearly he did not trust himself to speak—and with a pathetically cheery “I’ll be back in a few minutes, never fear,” the Curé dashed along the grass-grown esplanade at a pace that would have struck his parishioners dumb with amazement.

“*Le brave petit gars!*” he was thinking, while running as he had never run before; “that’s the stuff from which all our Breton heroes have been made . . . but help him . . . and me also, *Sainte Vierge Mère des Anges* . . . for we are both in sore straits!”

He turned sharply to the left on leaving the walls, and glanced exasperatedly at the thatched roofs of Kermario that seemed so far away, stupidly nestling at the foot of bastion after bastion of jagged cliff. For the fraction of a second he stood irresolute on the airy path hanging like a cornice from the very brink of the Falaise, and this time it was not precisely a prayer that he breathed! Just then, however, the moon rose triumphantly above the dark trees of Kermario, illuminating with a sudden shower of pale gold the gray tower of his church where it stood on a wide, projecting ledge, surrounded by its tiny cemetery, not a quarter of a mile away. Without further hesitation the Curé swung off towards it, scrambling down the stony incline at a breakneck speed, which deprived him of his broad-leaved hat, twirled his *rabat* most rakishly to one side, and cut his well-worn silver-buckled shoes in more than one place, but landed him at last, breathing an exclamation of relief, before the ever wide-open doors of the little sanctuary. The decorous calm of the silent chancel took him for once utterly by surprise, and it was quite mechanically that he bent the knee and crossed himself as he passed the High Altar, where the ruby light of a hanging-lamp shone dully against the gorgeous background made by a rose-window, through

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which the low moon spread patches of brilliant color across the rough old granite pavement.

Quickly the Curé pushed open a small door covered and padded with faded felt, and rushed into the sacristy, where the aromatic odor of centuries of incense lingered. Away up among the groined stone arches a couple of bats were circling aimlessly, and at the opening of the door one of them swooped down with a curious, baby-like squeak to investigate the intruder, its round, beady eyes shining in the silvery darkness as though touched with a phosphor-point.

Unhesitatingly, M. Kornog turned the key of one of the carved wooden presses with which the lofty little room was lined. What he was about to perpetrate savored of sacrilege to this simple-minded, faithful-hearted priest, but the sacrifice of his own feelings in the matter had been accomplished when he had selected the shorter and more practical way of freeing Pierrek. With a slightly-shaking hand he seized a slender-necked, silver-mounted vessel standing by itself upon a small shelf. That it contained a sufficient quantity of the Sacred Oil for his purpose he ascertained by holding it up between his eyes and the white moonshine flooding in at the open window, then he turned brusquely, with a half-smothered sigh, and recrossing the church diagonally, ran out into the night.

Surely at that moment the Curé of Kermarioker must have been pleasing in the sight of all his beloved Breton Saints!

### CHAPTER III

Still will they serve the Sea, nor aught efface  
The debt that holds them to her as with gyves,  
She is the nursing Mother of their race,  
The Mistress of their lives.

For in that far day when the Heavens did fall,  
And the Earth shook they weened had been secure,  
She drew her waves about them like a wall  
And kept them firm and sure.

M. M.

"NONSENSE!" the Curé of Kermarioker was energetically saying, while dexterously stoppering some fresh tobacco into his favorite briar; "nonsense! make a priest out of that predestined sailor lad! You must be mad, Gwellan, to think of such a thing!"

On the other side of the breakfast-table the Abbé Gwellan, a keen-faced enthusiast, tall, amazingly thin and wiry, whose bright hazel eyes retained all the clearness of youth, and did not belie the freshness of the soul they mirrored, shifted his half-smoked cigarette from the left to the right corner of his mouth, and said, quickly:

"I'm surprised at you, Kornog; really one would think to hear you that our sacred calling is the last shift of the incompetent."

"You entirely wrong me there," his friend and host retorted, with some heat; "I merely stated that Pierrek is not of the stuff from which good priests are carved—not even such priests as you and I, who have to be half

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sailor, half doctor, half farmer, and half a dozen other things besides. You argue from what I told you about the boy's behavior when his arm was caught in that iron pipe at Kermario, that such pluck should eventually be turned to the benefit of Mother Church, but you know as well as I do that what we need in our branch of God's service is an entirely different brand of courage from that."

M. Gwellan unceremoniously shrugged his shoulders.

"Twaddle," he remarked, dryly, "mere twaddle, especially coming from a man like you, whose own particular brand—since that's what you call it—can be made to cover such tall principles as—er—those you yourself go by. You don't esteem physical courage in a priest! Why, no man on this coast has taken so active a part in life-saving at sea as you have, no one has faced contagion, dangers, hardships, or, for the matter of that, beaten down—er—temptations of every kind with a more cheerful face—a stouter heart!"

The Curé of Kermarioker dropped his pipe, rose so quickly that he almost overturned his chair, and strode to the broad hearth, where an ideal fire of turf, driftwood, and pine-cones curled in rainbow-tinted flamelets beneath the huge stone chimney. He hated praise, this modest village priest, and resented it so greatly, even from this lifelong friend, that for a moment he stood with his back to him, gazing angrily into the red heart of the blaze, scarcely redder, however, than he himself had become.

"That's right," drawled M. Gwellan, "fly into a rage now! Annihilate me! I am your guest, and therefore entirely at your mercy! Do you know, my Alanik,<sup>1</sup> that for a priest"—and he gave great emphasis to the word—

<sup>1</sup> Little Alan.

"you have a very fiery nature? A little more and you would have thrown something at my head just now! Well, well, never mind, your powers of persuasion, muscular as they may be—and undoubtedly are—have no effect on me, and I still hold by the theory that a seminary is the right place for Pierrek."

M. Kornog whirled round in his customary impulsive way, but amusement danced in his deep-set eyes now, and the flush had quite receded from his weather-beaten face.

"Oh, I know you were not born in the Monts d'Arrée for nothing," he exclaimed. "You and your parishioners possess a quality of stubbornness before which all other Breton obstinacy sinks into insignificance, and yet you must confess that the atmosphere of the seminary is often one of enervating æsthetic emotion. Some people, of course, mistake this for holiness, but such natures as Pierrek's, at least, are better out of it. You see I also cling to my ideas."

"I never doubted that you would," was the half-discouraged, half-mocking rejoinder. "Still you are a miscreant, old friend, and it will be well for you not to air such principles too freely in these distracted times of ours."

"Bah! I told very much the same thing to Monseigneur a week ago," the Curé laughed, quietly picking up and refilling his mishandled briar.

"What!" almost screamed M. Gwellan, swinging his chair back from an angle of forty-five degrees to the perpendicular, and bending eagerly forward. "You told that to Monseigneur de Brazeuc! And may I inquire how he took it?"

"Certainly, since you are so curious. He took it laughing! Don't you forget that Monseigneur is first a



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Breton noble, then a Prince of the Church, and finally a very just and clear-sighted man. . . . I . . . but whom have we here?" he interposed, as the door slowly swung open to admit no less a personage than Pierrek. Pierrek, alert from head to foot with some strong emotion that darkened his gray eyes to a shining purple, and quivered on his rosy lips.

"What's the matter, *Moussaillon*?" his patron asked, stretching out a kindly hand towards the gallant little figure in woollen jersey, canvas trousers, and bare feet; for naturally the small sabots had been respectfully left outside the door, together with the inevitable scarlet *béret*.

Quite unembarrassed, Pierrek advanced to within half a foot of his Curé, and gravely shook hands, first with him and then with the other *Monsieur Prêtre* who had risen to join the group before the hearth. "I'm starting with my apprenticeship next week, Monsieur le Recteur!" he announced, exultingly, and then added, in still more jubilant tones, "and just think of it, it will be deep-water fishing then, miles and miles off coast!"

The two priests exchanged a swift glance over the sunny head that barely came to their elbows, and taking silence for approval the lad continued:

"I'll be father's *mousse*, and be signed on regularly to earn half a man's share. Next Saturday I have my baptism, you know, Monsieur le Recteur! It will be at low tide, and all the other *mousses* will bury me up to the neck in the wet sand, and then rub me all over with sea-weed, singing all the time the '*Pligadur an den méo*.' Then they'll pour a pail of sea-water over my head, and give me my new name. Cousin Rodic says it will be *Mor-Horc'h*,<sup>1</sup> most likely, because I swim so fast." He

<sup>1</sup> Porpoise.

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stopped breathlessly, all a-quiver with delight, and M. Kornog, happening to look again in his friend's direction, could scarcely restrain a smile at the latter's comical discomfiture.

"And aren't you afraid of the *mousses*'s rough handling?" he said, tentatively. "You know, mon p'tit, that they don't go gently about it."<sup>1</sup>

"Afraid! Who's afraid, Monsieur le Recteur?" the boy cried, contemptuously. "Not we of Kermarioker, at any rate." The curious cross formed when he frowned by his dark eyebrows meeting upon a vertical wrinkle gave for a second an incredible look of harshness to his handsome brown face. Almost at once, however, the look was gone, and the clear voice piped forth again with renewed energy, "You may be sure, Monsieur le Recteur, that when I am *mousse* you'll never lack fine mackerels, turbot, and lubines, that Mamm-Goz Mari-Gwezek will cook for your dinner, and also your *déjeuner* on fast days."

Suddenly M. Gwellan, who had as yet said nothing, bent towards Pierrek, and, touching him lightly on the shoulder, asked, almost imploringly:

"Would you not rather go to the seminary, Pierrek, in order later on to become a learned and good priest of God, like Monsieur le Recteur? There are fine gardens at the seminary, gardens like those of Kermario, only tidier; and think of all the joys that would await you later, of the grand gold-and-silver vestments you would don on feast days, of the beautiful *Pardons* you would superintend, of the good you could do to your parish!"

He stopped, a little embarrassed by the look with which his small listener was contemplating him. M.

<sup>1</sup> The rough play alluded to has in some instances been carried so far as to cause serious injury.

Kornog, watching the scene from within the shadows of the projecting granite chimney-piece, was careful not to interfere by word or gesture, and yet there was a sarcastic curl of the firm lips that still further disconcerted the unhappy Curé of Vilmenez des Monts d'Arrée. He felt that his attempted effects, dramatic and persuasive, had fallen absolutely flat, and instantly he became ten times more interested yet in this strange boy, who, with one solid little brown paw planted on each hip, chose to remain silent, protesting only by a sudden closing of two fresh young lips and a peculiar stony stare that had at the first words transformed his bright little face.

"Wouldn't that be a lot better than having to earn your bread by the sweat of your brow, amid stress of storm, and danger to life and limb?" the enthusiast recommenced, waxing eloquent in his eagerness to convince. "Look at the hardships your father has to put up with, the privations, the distress in winter, when the boats can't go out and money is scarce. A bright, lovable *gars* like you would have no trouble to learn, and the good fathers are so kind and patient and liberal! You'd like it, Pierrek, I assure you." As he ended he suddenly fixed his magnetic gaze intently upon the silent boy in a manner he had often found effective, and which showed that he was accustomed to find the eyes of others quail before his own. Pierrek met the masterful look with a reserved steadiness more difficult to deal with than open defiance, and utterly nonplussed, M. Gwellan gave to his fellow-priest an appealing glance, in which the latter detected such genuine concern that he instantly moved forward.

"Pierrek," he said, with a faint touch of sternness, "don't you understand what Monsieur le Curé is taking the trouble to explain to you?"

Pierrek turned brusquely towards his own Curé with a peculiar gleam in his eyes. He was breathing hard, and red waves came and went beneath his sunburned skin. "You don't wish me to do that; it isn't you who thought of it, Monsieur le Recteur," he at last said, in a singularly hard and thoroughly unchildish voice. He came near to his protector—quite near, until his rolled-up woollen sleeve touched the long black soutane. "You don't want me to go to the seminary," he repeated, through now pitifully trembling lips, the sight of which gave the Curé of Vilmenez genuine remorse. To have caused such extreme and undeserved pain to a child was crime unpardonable in his eyes; also he felt keenly what an uncomfortable dilemma confronted his friend, through what he felt to be his own incorrigible rashness and reluctance to take advice. Powerless to avert it, he saw the storm he had aroused break, and stood with speechless amazement as with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes Pierrek, shaking all over with wild excitement, poured forth his long-contained wrath.

"I know it wasn't you; I know it wasn't!" he was saying, incoherently, word tripping over word in that guttural Breton speech that strangely enough seems best fitted to express ungovernable rage or infinite tenderness. "You would not have me betray the sea. . . . I *will* be a fisherman like we all are . . . and when I grow up I'll be a *Terreneuvas*<sup>1</sup> . . . and when I am twenty-one they'll give me the blue collar and red pompon, and I'll be *Paotr-ar-gestel*<sup>2</sup> and fight the accursed *Saozons*<sup>3</sup> to the death. . . . I'll . . ."

But here the Curé, who had been wellnigh as greatly

<sup>1</sup> Cod-fisher on the Newfoundland and Icelandic routes.

<sup>2</sup> Topman in the rigging of the then war-ships.

<sup>3</sup> Saxons, the English; detested since immemorial time.

taken aback as his guest, interrupted the indignant tirade.

"Enough!" he said, severely, dropping a heavy hand on Pierrek's arm. "You forget yourself!" and without another word he firmly led the boy from the room, closing the door behind him.

The poor Curé of Vilmenez, left alone, positively gasped. What had he done? Was there any sense in a man of his age and experience making so ridiculous a *faux-pas*? Bitterly did he anathematize himself for his folly, and twice did he approach the door in his desire to beg mercy for the young culprit, who he well knew would not escape punishment at the hands of the tender-hearted but somewhat impulsive leader of the Kermarioker flock.

The early brightness of the cosy dining-room had vanished some time before, and a sudden shower that had driven up from the sea began to drum dismally on the sloping glass roof of the tiny adjoining conservatory, built by M. Kornog's own hands, and the pride of his heart. Chilly gusts of wind fluttered the snowy window curtains, and with an exclamation of impatience the Abbé rose to close it; having done so he remained planted in front of the streaming panes, disconsolately gazing out upon the drenching parterres.

The old presbytery, built more than four centuries before, of that finely-grained granite that shows age merely by toning down to indescribably mellow shades of gray and faint green, shot with overtones of silvery rose, stood with a somewhat aggressive air of solidity in the exact centre of a curiously reposeful and methodical garden; a veritable *Jardin de Prêtre*, cut into regular squares by narrow paths of moss-grown stone, framed on each side by neatly-clipped box hedges, and borders of feathery white carnations that bloomed two-thirds of every year

in extraordinary profusion. The eastward end of the little domain was surrounded on three sides by high walls, and within that protective semicircle, espaliered with gnarled and crooked pear and peach trees of great fruitfulness, thrived quaint, old-fashioned vegetables and flowers in perfect amity; here great lilac-tufted clumps of lavender fraternized with verdant rows of spinach; there huge bushes of cabbage-roses scattered their deep-hued petals between the trim lines of a company of carrots, and farther on a wide square of artichokes, fronted by thick waves of curly-leaved parsley, was poetized by the sweetly-fragrant presence of myrtle and rosemary, arbutus and laurel. Nevertheless, not a stalk was anywhere out of place, not a twig so indecorous as to thrust its next-door neighbor ungenerously aside. Monsieur le Recteur had seen to that, for he was his own gardener, and suffered no rioting whatever, even of Nature's own making.

Just now much of the effect had disappeared beneath the veil of rain, but even thus, something of the Curé's masterful spirit made itself so evident in his handiwork to the Abbé's eye that a momentary smile crossed his disconsolate face, and half involuntarily he turned to seek similar evidences within. Nor were they difficult to find. The modest home, inside as well as out, was the perfection of well-organized order. The dark wainscoting of all the rooms shone like polished onyx, the simple but massive furniture, dating almost as far back as the house itself, had been so perseveringly waxed and rubbed that it, too, dazzled the eye, and in each cavernous window merry little canaries and ruby-winged goldfinches wagged prosperous tails within immaculate brass cages hung above square boxes of scarlet geraniums that seemed to be perpetually in full bloom.

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All this tidiness by no means excluded comfort, and even here and there a thoroughly artistic touch, for there were plain but comfortable-looking red serge curtains *à la Bretonne* to the windows over the marvellously white and dainty muslin ones, washed and washed again by the faithful housekeeper, old Mamm-Goz Mari-Gwezek; here and there an antique *bahut*, crowned by a few pieces of quaint and not unvaluable *bric-à-brac*, brought back by sailors from far-off lands to their beloved Recteur; all this bathed in a subtle, clean, homely odor to which the smoke of good tobacco was no stranger.

M. Kornog's own particular den opening from the dining-room, which his good old housekeeper pompously called the *salon*, much to her master's amusement, was especially characteristic of its daily occupant, in its mingled expression of simplicity and efficiency. Long, rather than wide, it was low-ceiled, and lighted only by one square window provided with a broad sill, where a collection of fuchsias, of which he was inordinately proud, basked in the clear light. The plain desk near the window was a model of tidiness, in spite of the comparatively enormous mass of papers and documents it supported. A row of prayer and mass books stood in rigid array to the left of the large stone inkstand; to the right, on a square block of black marble, a small bronze statue of "Notre Dame de la Clareté" was enthroned, and behind the well-worn blotter sat the little tin cash-box containing all the priest's worldly wealth. Above the truly immense open fireplace hung a wonderful crucifix, hewn in high relief from a sheet of blue granite, and presented to M. Kornog by the artist himself, a Jesuit Father of extraordinary talent, who had been at the seminary with him many years ago. There was a "grandfather's clock," too, in a corner, ticking loudly and pleasantly,

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with a cheerful "whir" of slightly-fatigued, old-fashioned wheels, and a couple of large, dark-oak settees on each side of the hearth, which the delightful host called *les petits coins des mes enfants*, his *enfants* being, of course, the poorest among his flock. Here many a weary, heavy-hearted fisherman had sat of a winter night, to go away comforted and cheered, less by the aid which, despite his poverty, the Curé would always contrive to give, than by the spirits of rest and hope which made this their dwelling-place.

It was here that after pacing up and down restlessly for a while M. Gwellan finally ensconced himself, to become absorbed in a train of thought so intricate and vexatious that he did not hear the door open, nor the brusque swish of the Cure's long *soutane* along the dazlingly polished floor.

"Dreaming again!" the hearty voice said, at his shoulder, and with a nervous start the poor Abbé turned upon his host a pair of startled, vacant eyes—not innocent of a very tell-tale moisture.

"What have you done with him?" he asked, anxiously, and M. Kornog laughed.

"Oh! tell me, do, please," repeated the other, "what have you done to the poor little mite?"

"Placed him under arrest for a while," the Curé answered, lightly, almost airily. "But," he added, with a humorous twinkle of his bright eyes, "he is not to be pitied, for he is sure to play all the time with Gris-gris, my African parrot. You know they are great chums, those two!"

He sat down in a deep cane *fauteuil* near the window and stretched out his long legs with a jerk. "As I have often told you, my dear friend," he said, at last, "you take things too much to heart. Where is the use of



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wasting the living present in the pursuit of impossible aims?"

M. Gwellan glanced furtively towards his companion's hands, which were lying strong and quiescent upon either knee. Then he answered, in a low voice:

"One cannot make one's self over again, and it is my nature, it appears, to pursue unattainable ideals."

The Curé did not change countenance. "Yes," he said, absently, "and it is that perhaps which makes you a better priest than I . . . but still, you see, I am never blind to the fact that God arranges everything for the best, and gives to each and every one a fitting aptitude—an allotted task. '*Chacun son métier,*' you know, '*et les troupeaux sont bien gardés.*'"

## CHAPTER IV

Since Law and Church alike, said they,  
Hold us beyond the pale,  
We'll hew us out a God that may  
Befriend the furtive sail.

Our Priest be he who best may see  
To tread our covert ways,  
Our Law whate'er by foul or fair  
May beat the Douaniers.

M. M.

THE rain that had set in "just before sunset"—a sure sign, as all coast people will tell you, of its enduring intentions—had splashed wickedly for four whole days and nights, transforming the sandy lanes of Kermarioker into a disheartening chaos of soupy ruts and miry puddles.

Sunk to the breast in a cabbage-field abutting on the shingle, Pierrek was watching with sullen, reproachful eyes the creaming crests of enormous waves break into swirls of suddenly discolored foam at the very foot of the hedge-row—a height they seldom attained. All around him the riotous cabbages formed other waves, ponderous and superb, the hues of which comprised every green, every blue, and every purple to be found on nature's palette, pailletted with moisture, and slashed with bands of sable shadow, where deep furrows ran beneath the rich gofferings of a thousand leathery leaves.

Pierrek's crimson *béret* above this ocean of verdure, looked like a slightly-faded poppy of unusual dimensions

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with which the wind had made sport to the shredding point, while the blue of his woollen shirt melted almost indistinguishably into that of the cabbage's velvety under-foliage. Heedless of the furious blasts that shook everything within sight, he centred his whole attention upon the sea, dirty and thick with sand and floating wrack, hardly able to restrain his anger at such treachery—for how could he ever become a *mousse* if right at the start she herself retarded his apprenticeship by blocking the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* in harbor.

The wild day was swiftly drawing to a premature and stormy close. A few moments more, and only a shredded remnant of clear storm-light remained, trailing over the line of pines that terminated the field towards the west; rugged trunk after rugged trunk bent by the eternal blast into all sorts of extravagant shapes, and tossing about flattened crowns of thick-set needles that looked like overgrown dust mops set there on purpose to sweep the murky atmosphere.

Poor Pierrek strained his eyes to catch a glimpse of evening blue amid the warring clouds overhead. *Juste de quoi faire une culotte de matelot* would, as the old saying goes, be fully sufficient to insure a speedy change of weather, but his search remained unrewarded, and with a sigh amounting almost to a groan he turned away. How dismally the wind shrieked! Would it never, never lighten? With a quick snap of his strong white teeth he remembered that the storm-signals were up at the semaphore, and that only last night a number of frightened onion-boats had scudded for refuge into Kermarioker harbor, where the great, green waves were tumbling over the pier with a sound like the booming of many guns. Indeed, all this put together seemed sufficient to crush the toughest of all youthful "hope against hope" endurance.

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A shrill whistle, modulated after the fashion of a lap-wing's rallying cry, flying down-wind from the direction of home, roused the fretting lad from his fevered absorption, and made him tear himself with the utmost rapidity from the tough and dripping embrace of the cabbages, for his father's summons was not a thing to disregard even for a second.

"Range alongside there, Good-for-naught!" Hervé Rouzik called out in his best storm-voice as soon as the hope of his house came scampering into view. "Been watching the weather again, eh? Well, my little lad, you'll have to learn before you deserve half a man's share and wage that patience is what a fisherman needs most."

"But, father," Pierrek argued, despairingly, "I've had lots of it these four long days, and its not been a bit of use."

But Hervé Rouzik was not a man to waste words over a profitless argument. What he had just said, obviously, met the needs of the moment, so he merely shook the mist-drops from the brim of his sou'wester preparatory to leading the way towards the inviting odor of *soupe au lard* stealing from the open door of his cosey cottage.

"You'll have your chance sooner than you expect," he at length vouchsafed to remark, turning upon the threshold and pointing a large, steady hand in the direction of the muddy sea and dirty gray sky. And there, yes, just where the dingy gray and dingier green merged into one, a narrow spot of dull-yellow was piercing through. "That!" commented Rouzik, is meant for the setting sun, and if we can see that much the storm's ended! All I hope," he concluded, as he disappeared within, followed by the overjoyed Pierrek, "is that your first experience won't take the heart out of you."

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During the night the weather did moderate, and the fog, that deadliest foe of mariners, blew away like flakes of cotton-wool, to be tossed by the wind beyond the allotted limits of the fishing-grounds.

"We'll go out, barring fog—always barring fog," the *Patron* had said to his little son, as the latter excitedly disposed his brand-new sabot-boots and sulphur-hued *cirage* within arm's-length of his solid *bec 'hin*<sup>1</sup> stuffed pillow. "If I had to wait six months I'd do it, sooner than go out on this coast in an autumn fog, for that means disaster as sure as sure!"

The *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* swung round the pier-head next morning on the shoulder of a gigantic wave that turned her over till her stout, rounded sides gleamed like a whale's back, and then went crashing into the seas at a splendid rate of speed, each successive comber parting in green-and-white hillocks on each side of her blunt bows. The *Patron*, from his post at the rudder, glanced keenly at the small form of his new *mousse* crouching close beneath the weather bulwark, his rosy face and dancing eyes peering bravely from beneath the broad brim of his gleaming sou'wester, and with an approving nod of the head audibly grunted his satisfaction. This, however, was but the start, and it remained to be seen how the boy would acquit himself during an experience that Hervé knew well might prove discouraging to much older hands.

In truth, the *Stéréden* soon began to do some really tall climbing, seeming at times to be endowed with a positively diabolical ability to outcurvet the waves themselves, and danced along to the wind's sour piping in a manner well calculated to upset the best seasoned stom-

<sup>1</sup> A variety of curly wrack used in Brittany to fill cushions, pillows, and hassocks.

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ach. Through it all, nevertheless, the sea-born, sea-bred boy maintained the uncommon self-possession that had stood him in such good stead on another and yet more dangerous occasion of his short life, frequently cocking his eye aloft to send ludicrously knowing glances into the rigging, or laughing in pure delight when the great russet mainsail swooped down almost horizontally above his head as the *chaloupe* reared up on end in one of her astonishing capers.

Time wore on without the slightest opportunity of dropping net or line over the side, and the *Patron's* thick eyebrows were more than once drawn together in annoyance beneath their stinging crust of salt, for he was beginning seriously to doubt the possibility of re-entering Kermarioker harbor before next morning's tide. The weather had once more thickened, the dreaded fog was sneaking coastward from the now indistinguishable horizon line, and the prospect of a long night's wild tossings under a minimum of canvas did not commend itself to Rouzik, especially when he thought of his little wife's agonized vigil far back there on that rock-bound shore which they of the *Stéréden* had long since lost sight of.

The only alternative, and that by no means a brilliant one, was to try and take shelter at the *Méan-Azen-lidigez*—such precarious shelter as the narrow fissure could afford which serves that grim fortress of blue-black rock as an apology for a harbor. The dilemma was indeed so vexatious that the master of Kermarioker's best fishing-smack indulged in a string of expletives, underlined by more than one "red hell of a malediction"—but fortunately for Pierrek's tender ears the wind appropriated them and whirled them derisively far astern.

Cautiously, feeling his way with the sureness of touch and keenness of judgment for which he was justly re-

nowned, Hervé Rouzik began to tack in the direction of those jagged bastions showing faintly now and again, as Chinese shadow-pictures do, behind an undulating curtain of iron-gray vapors flecked with spindrift. A wave of the *Patron's* hand had sufficed to acquaint the crew with this change of destination, and Pierrek, catching on the wing as it were the words *Méan-Azen-lidigez*—a name to conjure with in far-off Finisterre—positively jumped for joy, forgetting, alas! the precarious nature of the flooring rising and falling beneath his still inexperienced feet, so that he went rolling head over heels among the empty fish-baskets amidships. In a second he was up again, fixing his bright glance on the crew as if daring them one and all to laugh at him, for he was a sensitive little chap, was Master Pierrek, and it was only when completely reassured on that score that he once more turned his delighted attention towards the fast nearing goal of his greatest ambition—namely, the mysterious and uninhabited islet of bleak cliffs that is called the “Sacrificial Stones.”

There it loomed above the gray, savage sea, not a mile away now, the waves leaping hungrily to leeward, and buffeting the great, sombre mass with their towering crests of foam. Again and again as the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* sank into the furrows, the eager lad could just see a jagged pinnacle frowning at him over the edge of a steep roller, then the next instant the dripping *chaloupe* would be flung out upon a breaking crest, and the vast rock stood once more revealed in all its naked splendor. Thicker and thicker grew the storm of spray that drove along the face of the waters, for as Hervé had feared, a regular northwesterly gale was blowing up, and the weather was getting every moment heavier. Certainly the landing just now would not be “a bobby’s job,” and

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few steersmen could, as did the *Patron*, have picked the gaps and valleys athwart each breaker, and threaded the one comparatively safe channel among the whirling currents. At this moment there was not merely annoyance in his face, but the stubborn and resolute expression of a man not accustomed to take a beating—a look of mastery, in fact, which would not tally with failure in the past nor in the present instant of stress.

The mist was racing towards them from the shrouded horizon line, opening up here and there into long corridors as the rapidly increasing wind tore its way through, and it was in short, quick tones that somehow rang out absolutely distinct, even in this sound-swallowing atmosphere, that Hervé Rouzik gave his commands. Already Pierrek could hear the rush of water over ledges and fissures, and then the “*glouff-glouff*” of the waves being sucked away to make room for others more mountainous still. At last the sheets were made fast, the shivering *chaloupe* jammed through a narrow neck between two huge, misshapen pillars of almost black basalt, and finally brought to within the dark compass of the only cleft that penetrated those solid ramparts, gleaming like polished onyx beneath the sinister storm-light.

With an eagerness that nearly cost him another and more serious tumble, Pierrek scrambled over the still heavily rocking side into a waist-high feather-bed of froth, and without waiting for the others, clambered up a slippery ladder of boulders, pursued by the lapping tongues of an incoming wave.

As after a stiff climb he set foot on the crown of the island, the whole place whirled into tumultuous life, and above his head a cloudy army of startled gulls and shearwaters massed themselves into screeching battalions—their lifelong quarrels a thing forgotten in face of the



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enemy—before noisily disappearing to seek shelter elsewhere. Pierrek, however, gave but a passing thought to the singular lack of manners displayed by these inhospitable islanders, as compared to his own feathered friends back there on Cape Kermario, and delightedly pursued his explorations—though slowly now, in deference to shouts from the rear—along the barren stretches of sandy grass, all whitened with salt and spume, and tufted here and there with low-growing clumps of thistles and rusty green mallows.

Soon his father and the *équipage* caught up with him, and they pursued their way together through the gathering dusk to a point on the cliff-edge where a dripping flight of natural steps slanted giddily down, apparently into the very heart of the wild roarings and bellowings of the tormented sea. One glance over the verge would have been sufficient for most wayfarers, even were they trained mountaineers, and yet men and boy, cumbered by their heavy clothing and loose sabot-boots reaching to the thigh, went leisurely down depth after depth as if entirely unconscious of the vicious efforts of the wind to blow such human flies into eternity. Half-way to the bottom, Hervé, who was leading, stopped, and signalled to the others to do likewise. He had reached a ledge of some breadth, forming a sort of terraced approach to the narrow entrance of a cave—a refuge resorted to by the sailors of the fishing-fleet only on strictly unavoidable occasions like the present, for it “enjoys,” as we say in Breton, a very evil name! Nothing in its aspect justifies this reputation; indeed, the gemlike lustre of its capriciously veined inner surfaces, the delicate colorations of the boldly arching vault and walls, that range from deepest sapphire blue to exquisite shades of emerald and malachite, glaucous topaz and pale amethyst, slashed

here and there by narrow streaks of shining mica, make of the place a retreat fit for Ahès herself; and yet, though the reason is known to few, the legendary awe which invests the *Méan-Azen-lidigez* is as deeply rooted in the hearts of all coast Bretons as the lonely rocks themselves in the bosom of the everlasting surge.

Hervé and his little company at once proceeded to make themselves as snug as circumstances permitted, for by now the huge stormy night was at hand. The wind had still increased, if such a thing was possible, and filled the cave with wild gusts that smelled of brine and violets, and swept out again to scoop up the crests of the warring waves, and fling them like whirling snow high up in the air. No one spoke, for Bretons are not talkative, and Pierrek alone fidgeted, his gray eyes gleaming in the faint light of the horn lantern around which they sat, his whole countenance quivering with excitement and unsatisfied curiosity, for so far he had seen only a cave—not quite an ordinary one, it is true, since it hung between sea and sky, instead of opening straight upon the shingle as other caves do, but where was the mystery concealed, that secret horror sometimes whispered around the hearth on long winter evenings, when children are already shuttered inside the *lit-clos* and have to strain their ears so hard to catch a word here and there? He would have given much to question his father, but that he dared not do, and with an impatience hardly to be controlled, he waited until the last mouthful of the frugal supper had been leisurely swallowed, and the *Patron* and his men had lain down upon the shelving stone floor in the easy, nonchalant way of the hardened sailor, to snatch what sleep they might. He himself had been peremptorily bidden to do likewise, and during a half-hour which seemed as long as a year, he forced himself to remain

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motionless, flat-on his back, a little behind the others. At last, however, a chorus of sonorous snores, alternating with the roar of the flying squalls outside, reassured him, and with wholly useless precaution he noiselessly rose to his feet, from which he had slipped the clattering sabot-boots on lying down.

Slowly he tiptoed to the entrance, and stood for a few moments braced against a small spur of rock running a quarter of the way across, looking intently into the night. Below him were many fathoms of intense darkness, lightened at their deepest depth by the white cataracts of in and out rushing breakers, while immediately at his feet bastion after bastion of broken and crenellated rock fell abruptly away into the howling gloom. This was decidedly unsatisfactory, and with a quickly repressed sigh he turned and prosecuted his search softly along the entire length of the cave, to find that in the most approved and romantic fashion it terminated in a sort of strangled corridor, quickly diminishing to a mere fissure within the granite bulk of the island. Its floor was not level with that of the cave, but gradually descended to no inconsiderable depth. Without a moment's hesitation the foolhardy boy entered where none had certainly been before, since a few paces within there was no passage for a full-grown man, and began to work his way forward, sometimes on all fours, and sometimes upright, according to the space afforded by the more or less irregular twists and windings of the crevice.

Yard after yard he wormed laboriously along through the pitchy blackness, impelled by a wild and reckless curiosity, ears and eyes keenly on the alert, for, since no other covert was afforded, it must surely be here that the secret lay enshrined. In a few moments, however, the fissure grew to be so tight a fit that even breathing be-

came something of a problem. Thereupon the bold discoverer, by no means disheartened, paused to take counsel with himself, and just at that moment a deeper, more resonant note than that of the storm—dwindled in this gut to a mere shell-like murmur—struck his ear, and caused a shiver of half-terrified, half-delighted anticipation to run down his back.

One wriggle more, and he felt the roof recede. Rising to his knees, he peered from side to side, listening with all his might, and yes, there a little to the left, above his head, which he craned backward almost to the dislocation point, he discerned a curious, fiery glow.

Pierrek was an uncommonly courageous lad, but still it was with the utmost difficulty that he succeeded in not shrieking aloud, and small blame to him too, under such circumstances.

"The witches!" he muttered, crossing himself energetically—"the witches!" and then suddenly an irresistible desire to see, whatever the cost, came over him like a wave of warmth, dissolving at once all the chill of his terror. He straightened himself cautiously to his full height and reached up with both hands. Again the sound he had heard before, weird and singularly harmonious, came floating down to him, and casting all prudence to the winds, he clutched and pawed and scrambled about until, swinging himself free from the ground, he began to rise as he had once seen a little sweep from Auvergne do in the chimney at home, striving with all his might to reach the spot whence shone that inexplicable luminance. Muttering impatiently to himself at the exasperating slowness of his progress, he yet took full advantage of every crack or projection which might aid him upward, and that with a tenacity and a consummate skill that many a professional mountaineer might have

envied; continuing his perilous struggle until his muscular little arms were stiff, and his fingers almost powerless with fatigue, scratched and bruised from tip to palm.

But everything comes to an end—generally a successful one when strength of mind and strength of body strive for it in perfect unison—and at last Pierrek found himself clinging to the lip of an irregular gap some few inches wide and about a foot and a half long, immediately surmounting, as luck would have it, a broad knob, or rather “saddle,” as the cliff-climbers say. Upon this he hoisted himself.

For a few seconds he did not venture to look through this arduously attained loop-hole, through which nothing now came but a whispering silence, and an intensified crimson glow! What was he going to see? A dance of long-toothed dishevelled witches, a *ronde* of Kourrigans, or perchance the *Diaoul*<sup>1</sup> himself, surrounded by his legions of *Aerevent*!<sup>2</sup> Truly his heart misgave him, and as he clung trembling within arm’s-length of this tantalizing mystery, a voice powerful and profound broke into a chant that vibrated louder and louder as it rose from some unknown depth. The stupefied listener, with a sense at once of extraordinary relief and of faint disappointment—for surely gnomes and fairies, devils and witches, must needs have a language of their own—recognized the ring of plain, every-day Breton.

“*Lavar d’un petra éo unam.*”<sup>3</sup>

These words, solemnly repeated three times, were followed by a pause, then another voice—shrill this one and piercing exceedingly—responded with extreme assurance:

“*An Stron-Varia hep ken penhini ’zo en nef!*”<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Devil.

<sup>2</sup> Evil angels.

<sup>3</sup> Tell me who is the one?

<sup>4</sup> Our Lady and none else aloft in the skies.

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With a little, choking gasp Pierrek brought his eyes to the level of the loop-hole and looked.

"Lots of people around a big *Sainte Vierge!*" he whispered to himself, and that, indeed, was all he could at first be certain of, thanks to the singular illumination of the great cavern beneath him, but his eyes gradually becoming accustomed to the smoky glow of a hundred resinous torches, fastened by iron rings to blood-red granite walls that arched upward into a vast impending vault of darkness, he saw that the central object was in fact an image, but not of the Virgin.

It was a great wooden siren, as Pierrek knew from having seen figure-heads not dissimilarly made, holding aloft in her right hand a rusted iron oar. She stood upon a pedestal directly opposite a sinister-looking natural monolith of the cavern's blood-red stone that occupied the exact centre of the illuminated space, and so closely resembled a tomb adorned with a carven drapery that Pierrek exclaimed "*Méan-Bez!*"<sup>1</sup> at the sight of it.

The face of this wooden image,<sup>2</sup> painted in crude colors and surrounded by stiff, gorgon-like tresses of dazzling orange-gold, bore an expression of petrified rage and hatred; the coarse lips drawn back in a savage snarl, uncovered sharp teeth set far apart, and the light-blue eyes staring between gaping lids were fierce and cruel beyond compare. Shells and marine incrustations still clung to her rigid red robe, and here and there a splash of gold paint roughly applied caught the glare of the

<sup>1</sup> A tomb.

<sup>2</sup> What follows is actual fact. This statue—the figure-head of some long sunken ship—was washed ashore many years ago, and was adopted by the Breton smugglers as their patron saint under the name of "*Notre Dame de la Fraude*"—literally, "Our Lady of Smuggling." The author as a child chanced by accident to witness the scenes and ceremonies described here.

torches. Of a truth, it was an appalling apparition, so much worse than any *Croquemitaine* poor Pierrek had ever heard of, that his hair began to prick all over his head, but just then his attention was distracted by the singular aspect and behavior of those whom he rightly took to be her worshippers, ranged before her in a jostling and unquiet semicircle. That these were *tuérien*—smugglers—he saw at once, for there were many faces down there not unknown to him, but why they were disguised as professional mendicants, and why each of them wore attached to his picturesque rags a cluster of purple fox-glove, he could not understand. A formidable assembly of the giants of the sea this, and an awe-inspiring, especially just now, when each brawny right hand brandished a murderous *pen-baz*,<sup>1</sup> and each left grasped a flask of *calvados*, the fiery Breton brandy! One who appeared to be their chief—a huge, gaunt man, strong-jawed and red-haired, was facing them, his back turned upon the great idol, and as he stood in priestly attitude with out-stretched hands, an older observer than the little *mousse* might have divined that he had but just completed the recital of some strange and blasphemous litany. In fact, it was only when much older and enriched by that experience which unlocks the treasures hoarded by a childish receptivity, that the details of this scene which he witnessed at such great personal risk, recalled themselves to Pierrek.

In a moment more the chief's<sup>2</sup> hand was raised to his broad-leafed *feltr*,<sup>3</sup> and he uncovered, everybody following

<sup>1</sup> Long wooden club.

<sup>2</sup> In Breton "Gourc 'hémmeñer" (commander) or "Pen-Mil-Deu" (chief of a thousand men), title of the so-called grand-priest of the smugglers.

<sup>3</sup> Chouan hat made of shaggy black felt.

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his example. Then, after a deep obeisance, he dipped a thick bunch of finely-curling marine weed into a barrel of sea-water, and reverently performed a perfectly orthodox *Asperges*, plentifully sprinkling the ghastly statue, before handing the *sparf*<sup>1</sup> to one who appeared to be his next in rank. The ceremony was performed in absolute silence, seemingly with a deep religious solemnity, and it was only when the last smuggler had had his turn, and their grim goddess, streaming with salt-water, appeared to have been but just drawn from the waves to come and preside over this gathering of her clan, that other libations were attended to; these of a more inflammatory kind, explaining the presence of the countless brandy bottles that at first sight might have appeared slightly out of place.

Pierrek, wearied almost to exhaustion by his necessarily cramped immobility, clung on desperately and almost automatically during the bacchanalian revel in his desire to see what was coming next, and his endurance was rewarded by seeing the chief of the smugglers suddenly straighten himself to his full gigantic height, and, turning to his men, prepare to address them.

"Brothers," he said, after a short pause, and in a voice accustomed to carry above the noise of sea and wind, "the time has come at this our yearly meeting for me to invite all who desire to continue in the service of 'Notre Dame de la Fraude,' to raise their *pen-baz*, and all who wish to leave our brotherhood to form in line behind me."

A forest of *pen-baz* flew up, but not a man moved from his position, and for a few moments perfect silence reigned again.

"Brothers," resumed the chief, in the same sonorous

<sup>1</sup> Aspersorium.



accents, "I rejoice to see your loyalty to Our Lady, and I thank you in her name" (here he bowed reverently to the baleful image). "And now," he added, holding at arm's-length his own flask of *calvados*, "let us give all together the war-cry of 'Our Lady'!"

Very fortunately for his neck, Pierrek had just taken a new hold upon the loop-hole's edge, else the sudden thunder of a thousand deep-throated voices echoing and re-echoing beneath the towering vault of the *Gooc'h Varc 'hadvurez* (the smuggler's cave), and beating like a crash of heavy artillery against his place of concealment, would undoubtedly have precipitated him, if only from sheer fright, down to the bottom of the shaft.

"Death to the *Douaniers*,"<sup>1</sup> they roared again and again, punctuating their cries with copious draughts of "fire-wine," which went far towards bringing the general enthusiasm to an extremely dangerous point. Soon the uproar became prolonged and continuous, for half a dozen bagpipes began to shrill forth, and all at once, as though obeying a prearranged signal, every man present tore the now drooping sprigs of foxglove from the ragged smock covering his ordinary clothes, and flung them violently before the goddess, until they rose high about her pedestal in a tide of pink and purple flecked with palest-green.

Once more the defiant words of the "Vespers of Cornouailles" were intoned, but Pierrek could stand it no longer. Bruised and terrified, shivering from head to foot as though suffering from a violent ague, he fell rather than scrambled down, damaging his person still further in his abrupt descent. He was so shaken when he reached the bottom that he lay panting and but half-conscious on

<sup>1</sup> Customs officials.

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the rock floor of the shelving corridor he had quitted a little less than an hour before.

With a shudder that rattled every tooth in his head, he opened his eyes again, and slowly, awkwardly, like a poor little wounded animal, he made his way back again, crawling on all fours at a snail's-pace. Once again Master Pierrek's curiosity had led him into trouble, nor had he yet come to the end of it, for as he painfully dragged his sore limbs out of the tunnel he found himself in the midst of what might be described as a veritable hornets' nest of his own creating.

Awakened from their heavy slumbers by the bacchanalian yells of the *tuérien*, which towards the last, such was the uproar, ended by reaching the sleepers even through those many intervening yards of granite, they at once realized what was going on in the heart of the "Sacrificial Stones," and also what an unfortunate moment they had selected for their visit to the smugglers' sacred domain. They did not joke, "those parishioners," as every one of the little party was well aware. Once a wretched coast-guard, who, burning with a desire for rapid advancement, had spied upon them and managed to surprise one of their "religious" ceremonies, was, as every one knew, advanced into a better world by the simple but effective process of being literally pulled into tassels, and finally cast from the top of *Méan-Azen-lidigez* onto the jagged boulders below. There the dismembered fragments of his carcass were found after a while by a crew of horrified sardine-fishers, but the criminals—quality and quantity unknown—could never be brought to book, and the incident was closed, though not forgotten. This is one of the reasons why when Hervé caught sight of his young hopeful crawling out of the ring of darkness framing the flat stone whereon the lantern had been placed, he seized

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him by the scruff of the neck with no tender hand. Indeed, Hervé, gentle as most very tall men are, could show severity of a very convincing kind when occasion demanded.

"Where have you been, you *Gwasoc'h*?"<sup>1</sup> he said, angrily. Then noticing the white face and trembling lips of the boy, who as a rule was by no means easily upset, he drew him more softly forward, and with no more than a reasonable sternness, elicited from him a full and unreserved confession. The men listened open-mouthed, while Hervé's face, already alarmingly grave, darkened perceptibly.

"We must get out of this, whatever the cost, and at once!" he pronounced, turning to his second. "We cannot risk its ever becoming known that the *Stéréden* was here to-night."

"But, *Patron*," the man objected, casting a quick glance at the flying scud eddying past the entrance to the cave, "we can never get out in this dog of a weather. Besides, who's to see the *chaloupe*? Don't you remember that *they*" — he designated the smugglers by an expressive raising of the shoulders — "don't come here in boats, but walk from *An Daouzec-Deiziou*"<sup>2</sup> through the passage of the *Drouized*.<sup>3</sup> That's where their boats are left, and they could never see us."

Hervé had given unmistakable signs of impatience while listening to this demurrer, and, scarcely allowing it to come to an end, exclaimed, wrathfully:

<sup>1</sup> Worst of all.

<sup>2</sup> The Four Weathers. Name of another group of rocks nearer to the mainland, which is so called because on each of its sides a different sort of wind is to be encountered.

<sup>3</sup> The passage alluded to exists, and connects the two rock islands, both deserted. It is supposed to be the work of the ancient Druids, who used the said islands for particularly secret rites.

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"You talk like an innocent, Nédélék Houarn, and what's more, as you may be aware, I am not overfond of having my orders discussed! 'Bout face, and let's march!"

The greenish light of a storm-rent dawn was stealing sulkily beneath a frowning bank of drifting clouds as the *Stéréden-Ab-Vorat* last made out the distant double peaks of Kermario. What the past night had been for those aboard, tossed ceaselessly upon a hissing, maddened sea, that threw itself bodily upward to meet the lashes of a driving rain, tasting of brine, and smartful to the skin, it is superfluous to dwell upon. Dripping from head to foot beneath their soaked *cirages*, the crew felt exhausted as they had scarcely ever been in their life of peril and stress, but Hervé, crouching low over the helm, was as alert as ever, as clear-sighted and resourceful, and filled beside with a pride greater than he could well have expressed, for at his side, game to the end, spite of fatigue and bruises, extraordinary experiences, wind, waves, hunger and thirst, clung Pierrek. Each lurch of the *chaloupe* threw him forward, so that he was obliged to brace heavily at times against his father's knee, but this neither of them heeded. The child's gray eyes—as dark gray as the somberest cloud scudding overhead—were half closed with utter weariness, and the handsome little face was pale; but, played out or not, he had throughout remained in what is called on the Breton coast a perfect sailor's temper. He had the true *feu-sacré* that makes good mariners and better fishermen. With characteristic muteness he had endured almost as much as the men themselves, for if he did not work as they did, they had experience behind them, and had not gone through his rough adventure in the cave. According to the code and laws of the *Pêcheurs de Bretagne* he had acquitted himself

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more than well, and Hervé smiled contentedly through the stinging layer of salt that stiffened on his tanned face. He was well pleased with his *mousse*, was Hervé Rouzik, and to tell the truth he was not a *Patron* particularly easy to satisfy.

## CHAPTER V

In faith and manly steadfastness  
He wrought through peril and through stress  
    Withouten murmuring;  
And since he put his strength in thrall  
Selfless, to serve the need of all,  
    He found himself a King.

M. M.

PIERREK from that day on seemed to leave childhood behind him almost completely. In the midst of the busy fishing season—part and parcel of it himself now—he was in his element. Strong and ambitious, he was never quite satisfied with what he accomplished, and that is always a good sign. He could already count and basket sardines with the swift, practised touch of one born to the business, but he had heart-of-oak qualities that impelled him ever forward, and urged him to learn his *mètier* to the finest minutiae, pestering the crew with questions about every morsel of rope, every bolt or hook they handled. His agile figure balanced on the farthest end of the bowsprit, his bonny face set against the wind, and his shrill, soft whistle, cutting the evening air like an arrow, struck the key-note of the home-coming of the heavily laden *Stéréden-Ab-Vor*, and he looked so typically a *mousse*, with the healthful tan gilding his rounded cheeks, his eyes darkening with pride at the magnitude of the day's catch, and his bright hair sparkling in the sunset light, that Lanäik, who always stood on the extremity of the breakwater to await him, would not now

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have had him be anything else. It seemed to her that whatever her opposition might have been, he would still have belonged to the sea, and with simple Breton resignation to the inevitable she accepted things as they were for the present. When, however, the future crossed her mind there appeared a far-away look of dreamy wistfulness, of faintly latent fear in those wonderful blue eyes of hers, since the years would unfailingly bring to Pierrek the hazards of conscription, and, besides this, she well knew that the dreaded excursions of the cod-fishers to the cold seas had already begun to tempt him. Indeed, as time wore on, she began to picture to herself more and more vividly the thousand and one dangers which he would encounter should Hervé allow him after all to join the Icelandic fishing-fleet. Sailors, and deep-sea sailors at that, the Rouziks always had been, from generation to generation, but her own people were salt-workers and land-owners in a small way. Hence her lack of enthusiasm for the sea, and a habit of "counting the cost" which she had inherited with other characteristics from a less adventurous ancestry.

She was no coward; far from it. Few Bretons are; their lives from the cradle up being too full of hardships to leave much room for the fear of death, but her tender heart and passionate love for her husband and child were apt to play her tricks, and against this not even a deep strength of principle and devotion to duty could guard her.

And now all the courage she possessed was to be called into action. At the end of one of the finest autumns the land had ever known a violent epidemic of cholera settled heavily upon Kermarioker, like a vulture upon a helpless prey, to gorge and gorge until it seemed at one time as if only a skeleton of the country-side population would be left.

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Medical aid was scarcely procurable, for the one doctor in charge of the district lived many miles away, and sorely indeed would Kermarioker have fared had it not been for its energetic Curé. From the first minute when the scourge appeared M. Kornog took hold—as sailors say—and governed the sick and the well alike, as no other could have done—almost literally with a rod of iron! The situation demanded much more than spiritual consolation and careful nursing, so the Abbé simply augmented his usual functions by those of King, Prophet, Physician, and many lesser offices as well, but especially Sanitary Inspector. No less powers were needed if he was to grapple successfully with this dread disease, that from time to time sweeps the Breton and Vendéen coasts.

From cottage to cottage he went night and day, untiringly; in turn berating, encouraging, and sympathizing with his patients; preaching, and enforcing with the hand of absolute power, the gospel of fresh air and common-sense precaution. He himself apparently bore a charmed life, for no harm came to him from crushing fatigue, lack of sleep, continual exposure, and that worst of all evils, the sense of a responsibility too great for one miserable human being to carry alone.

Late one October night he returned home after sixteen consecutive hours among the sick and dying, and utterly wearied, both in mind and body, sat down—literally for the first time that day—beside the almost extinguished fire of his study. It was drizzling outside, and a sour little wind whimpered fretfully around the house, blowing spasmodically through the open window the pungent odor of sea-weed and wet shingle. At the foot of the crags the stricken village was wrapped in the fevered torpor of disease, and the Curé sighed heavily as he



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thought of the misery and suffering he had witnessed since sunrise.

Hardly had he stretched his tired legs, before the door opened, and his old housekeeper, wrinkled and brown like the proverbial fruit of that prettily pink flowering bush, the medlar, and wearing the snowiest of coiffes and the most immaculate of kerchiefs and aprons, brusquely entered the room. For a moment she gazed furiously at her master, with a pair of very blue eyes that looked incongruously young in so grandmotherly a countenance, then placing her arms akimbo, she proceeded to address him in a manner that would have made him laugh, had such a thing as a laugh been left in him.

"And will you tell me in the name of all the blessed saints of Cornouailles how much longer you're going to lead this shameful life, Monsieur le Recteur?" she cried, in a high-pitched voice, trembling with uncontrollable anger. "Is there any reason," she continued, without giving him time to answer this apostrophe, even had he desired to do so, "in your gallivanting in the way you do? Just look at the state you're in. My word, but you don't look like a Christian, let alone a holy Priest of God!"

M. Kornog sat up and looked at his muddy shoes with extreme surprise, then slowly his eyes travelled to the moisture dripping from his black soutane, which, utterly unnoticed by him, had during his recent "gallivantings" acquired a most regrettable inclination to cling about his weary limbs with soppy persistence.

"Well, my good Mari-Gwezek, I *am* sorry," he said, humbly. "I did not know I had gotten myself in such a mess, and I only trust I have not spoiled your nice clean floor."

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A scornful cackle interrupted him rudely. "And who cares for the floor?" Dame Gwezek acidly retorted. "One will clean it up to-morrow morning and be none the worse. But what about you risking your hide as you're doing now by sitting down in a puddle? Go upstairs at once, Monsieur le Recteur, and get into your bed. I'll bring you your soup there, and if you don't swallow it down while it's hot you'll hear from me!"

A twinkle of humor flashed in the Curé's tired eyes. The faithful old servant's dragoonings were just the sort of tonic he needed, and there is no knowing whether he would not have acted upon her exceedingly sound advice had he not at that instant been arrested in the very act of getting out of his chair by a loud knock at the outer door.

"Name of a dog!" shrieked Mari-Gwezek, whose language when thoroughly aroused was by no means parliamentary. "Are they after you again, the brute beasts. . . . But wait a minute . . . just wait a minute," and she was rushing towards the entrance-hall, when, with a couple of long-legged strides, her master passed her and himself admitted a slender figure clad in oil-skins, from which the water dripped in little rills.

"Pierrek!" the Curé cried, in alarm. "Surely there is no one sick at your house."

Breathless from his run up-hill, Pierrek waited a second before answering, and his voice trembled sorely as he did so. "It is my father, Monsieur le Recteur, and he wants you," was all he said, but the way in which it was said contained volumes.

Even Mari-Gwezek, who had joined the others beneath the flickering hall lamp, remained for once in her life speechless; but as the Curé, with a smothered exclamation of grief, snatched hat and umbrella from a neighbor-

ing rack, she whirled upon Pierrek, her whole face alight with excitement.

"You are lucky, my lad, that it's your father who's got the plague to-night," she shrieked, as though talking to a deaf man, "for if it had been any one else I wouldn't have let Monsieur le Recteur go out again!" With which consolatory remark she abruptly turned her back upon the unwelcome visitor, and disappeared, still loudly vituperating, within the sacred precincts of kitchen and still room.

The night had darkened still more as the Curé and his young companion left the house, but their practised feet followed without much difficulty the quiet, moss-grown path crossing the adjoining cemetery. There was a chill and bitter feeling in the atmosphere which made them both shudder, and as they walked past the little shrine of St. Hervé de Kermario, cut deep into a huge block of stone, before which a bright little lantern burns night and day, M. Kornog was struck by the hard face and stony eyes of his protégé.

"How old are you now, Pierrek?" he asked, with apparent irrelevance, as he followed the boy over the low wall of the burying-ground.

"Nearly sixteen, Monsieur le Recteur, and that's not enough for me to take his place yet."

Surprised at the quick reading of his thoughts, and yet more so at the curtness of the tone, the Curé walked about a hundred yards farther before speaking again. Then, without looking at the lad, but seemingly entirely absorbed by the difficult task of picking his way from stepping-stone to stepping-stone down the incommodious short-cut they had elected to take, he said, in a slow, kindly voice:

"What is amiss with you, *Moussaillon*, besides the very natural anxiety caused by your father's illness?"

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Pierrek stopped so short that the priest almost came into violent collision with him, and there in the pitchy darkness of midnight, unable to distinguish each other's features, though scarcely a foot apart, they paused.

"The *Patron* will die!" came the cutting voice of Pierrek, speaking as though of a total stranger. "He will die, because a while ago I saw *Lestr ar Vossen!*"<sup>1</sup>

The Abbé Kornog involuntarily recoiled. "What nonsense is this, Pierrek?" he said, angrily, more on account of his own unguarded movement of fear than at the boy's words. "You, a bright, educated *gars*, to believe in that legend?"

"And so would you, Monsieur le Recteur, if you'd seen it, with its coal-black sails and empty decks, pitching and tossing beyond the islands! And as I was looking at it, hardly believing what I saw, I'll risk my share of Paradise if I did not see as clear as day a white shape, all swaddled in thin stuffs that floated in every direction, rise like smoke from behind the main-sail, and spread and spread into a great cloud of mist towards our house. Yes—yes—you can say what you like, Monsieur le Recteur, not to disrespect you, but it was the plague Virgin, the boneless, fleshless, heartless virgin that poisons the land and even the sea with her dead breath!"

Slowly and thoughtfully the Curé raised his hand, and made the sign of the cross in the air.

"*Veni Creator . . . accende lumen sensibus, infunde amorem cordibus . . . infirma nostri corporis, virtute firmans perpeti,*"<sup>2</sup> he murmured to himself, solemnly,

<sup>1</sup> The pest ship: a phantom vessel that heralds the approach of cholera.

<sup>2</sup> Come, Holy Ghost, guide our minds with Thy blessed light, inflame our hearts with love, and fortify our weak flesh by a virtue that naught can shake.

while Pierrek bowed his head to the church's Latin, but without the least confidence in what he vaguely understood to be some form of exorcism.

After peering at the wellnigh indistinguishable face of the lad for some seconds the priest started, as if suddenly recovering himself, and then in his usual quick, unhesitating way, set off again at redoubled speed without uttering another word. They were now close to the village, and ahead of them there suddenly burst through the gloom the dazzling emerald-green rays of the revolving light of *Ar C'hentrou*.<sup>1</sup> By the aid of its waxing and waning gleam they cleared the wall of Lanäik's flower-garden, and then, as though simultaneously turned to stone, they stood planted side by side in the very midst of her favorite flower-bed, gazing wide-eyed at a tiny globe of exquisitely brilliant blue light—just the exact tint of a blossoming hortensia, flitting up and down in the strangest will-o'-the-wisp fashion immediately above Hervé Rouzik's chimney.<sup>2</sup>

"My father's soul! My father's soul!" moaned Pierrek, in a choking, agonized voice, utterly unlike his own, and with that fell flat upon his face at the Curé's feet.

In the cottage Hervé had been laid at full length, still half dressed, upon the heavy eating-table that had been dragged beneath the open window, as is the custom in Finisterre when the chief of the family is about to die. His eyes were closed, his powerful hands were clinched at his sides, and through his blue lips came the labored breath in slow gasps, but still he was not sleeping, for in a little while he began to breathe less heavily, and murmured:

<sup>1</sup> The Spurs: name of the double rock point whereon the lighthouse is built.

<sup>2</sup> This phenomenon has been observed by credible persons.

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"Lanäik-gez.<sup>1</sup> Where is Pierrek? I'm at the end of my quid, little one . . . and . . . I'd have wished to see Monsieur le Recteur. . . ."

Lanäik, kneeling on the floor beside him, her face almost as ghastly as his own, choked in her attempt to reply. It was so terrible to see this man, young and strong, whom she adored, falling thus by the way with scarcely a second's warning. Feebly he made a hesitating attempt to put his hand upon her bowed head—Bretons are not caressing in their ways, and this gesture was alone sufficient to prove to her how clearly he felt himself doomed. "Pierrek is too young . . . too young to take . . . my place," he gasped. "But Nédélék is a good man . . . he will look after him . . . and the *Stéréden* . . . she's not quite new . . . the *Stéréden* . . . but she's all right . . . not a spar . . . nor a rope's missing . . . the nets, too. . . ."

"Oh, Hoärvé,<sup>2</sup> don't!" she interrupted, unable to bear any more, and then between the long, deep sobs that shook her from head to foot: "*N'han' Doué! N'han' Doué!* Don't tell me all this. What do I care what happens if you leave me?"

A look of extraordinary pain and anxiety crossed the man's already convulsed features, and he tried to raise himself on his elbow. At that moment the door opened with a creaking sound, and the Recteur, somewhat pale but ready and composed, entered, followed by the feebly-groping, bent figure of Pierrek. A gleam of satisfaction lighted up for a second Hervé's fast-glazing eyes, as his life-long friend bent over him. No thought of possible infection seemed to enter the Curé's head, for he remained there inhaling directly the breath of those pant-

<sup>1</sup> Beloved.

<sup>2</sup> True Breton form of the name commonly written "Hervé."

## GRAY MIST

ing lips, while he felt for the fluttering pulse. Pierrek and Lanäik stood behind him, with hands clasped in agony, waiting for the verdict.

The earth-floored room was lighted only by the dim rose-glow of the ever-present turf fire and the faint orange gleam of a couple of resin candles, flickering in the draught of the open window and widely-yawning hearth. Outside the long Atlantic roll was swinging slowly, the soft recurrent thunder of the surge upon the rocks below filling the little house with that great voice that is of Time, yet speaks of Eternity.

"You must rouse yourself, Hervé!" the Curé was saying. "Cholera is not cured by lying down, my comrade!" and slipping one arm under the dying man's shoulders he tried to raise him to a sitting posture.

"Don't bother yourself, Monsieur le Recteur; I'm past that now, . . ." the weakened voice remonstrated. "All you can do for me is to hear my confession, and then—" but here he was suddenly cut short by a pang of pain almost intolerable, and the grip of his hand tightened in the priest's.

He was very learned in medicine, was M. Kornog, and his nursing was a thing past praise, yet he was soon convinced that nothing he—or for the matter of that any one else—could attempt would be of the slightest use. Alleviate the wretched man's sufferings by administering repeated doses of laudanum and brandy he did, but further than this he could not go, and at dawn, before it was wholly light, while the glistening damp of the vanishing night spangled every twig and leaf and blade of grass in the little garden below the window, Hervé's restlessly-tossing head fell back limply upon the rough pillow, and all was over.

A soft, white mist was blanketing sea and shore as the Curé left the little house below the crags. The air was

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very still now, and this quiet was somewhat startling by the suddenness of its advent, for until an hour before that sour, enervating little wind had scolded and fretted ceaselessly. In the village nothing stirred as yet.

The Curé's heart was heavy indeed. He had both loved and honored Hervé Rouzik, and Lanäik's plight filled him with anxiety, since, as he well knew, she was not one of those practical business women who can take the heavier burdens upon their shoulders, but a tender little plant, always sheltered by her husband's love from the rougher experiences of life. Pierrek, too—bright, obstinate, impulsive Pierrek—what would become of him now . . . was he fitted to assume the difficult position of *chef de famille* and of captain of a fishing-boat, even though this last dignity would be but purely honorary at present? The priest's strong face was set like flint as he considered these things.

For so utterly tired out a man, the pace at which he breasted the steep incline leading towards the presbytery was but one more proof of the man's iron strength, and the sun was still far from rising when he came abreast of the last house on this side of Kermarioker—an inn, kept by a hard-headed, hard-fisted man, who passed for being the most quarrelsome individual for miles around. He was at that very moment engaged in filling by the silvery light of the awakening day a stout, round-bellied bottle with vile *calvados*<sup>1</sup> from a stone jug, preparatory to handing it to a sickly-looking man who wore a blouse of coarse blue linen over his fustian clothes, and the hat of a *metayer*,<sup>2</sup> very much on the right side of his unpleasant head. At sight of the tall, black-robed figure, this early purchaser of strong waters snatched the bottle with ob-

<sup>1</sup> Potato brandy.

<sup>2</sup> Farmer.



vious haste from mine host's hand, and attempted to thrust it into a capacious pocket, all uncorked though it was, but he was just a second too late, for in one stride Kermarioker's vigilant shepherd was at his side.

"What have we here?" he said, with that peculiar irony in which he indulged when determined to make himself as disagreeable as possible, and which his flock one and all feared even more than his worst angers. "Why, actually my excellent friend Toulouzek making his little provision of 'wife-beater' on the sly!"

The innkeeper looked askance at this unwelcome disturber of traffic. His thick, brutal lips twitched, and he was on the point of speaking, when the priest's deep-set eyes met his, and he desisted. One would almost have sworn that the bully of Kermarioker was ill at ease, and . . . why, yes—intimidated! As to M. Kornog's "excellent friend," a person as a rule disinclined to go to meet quarrels—probably because quarrels generally spared him that trouble—he was engaged in industriously mopping his singularly sloping forehead with a by no means doubtful bandana handkerchief.

"I invite you to give that bottle back to Al Loär!"<sup>1</sup> the priest said, without in the least raising his voice. "You owe it to him as it is—and to me also in a different way, for I have forbidden you to meddle with spirits—at least, while the cholera is here!"

This kind invitation was not at once complied with; indeed, the Curé's words seemed to cause real pain to the good Toulouzek, who, pale with excitement, shuffled from one foot to the other, torn between the fear of having to part with his cherished bottle, and the abject dread he entertained for his spiritual adviser.

<sup>1</sup> The moon; a sobriquet applied to him on account of his round red face.

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His predominant feeling just then, however, was perhaps annoyance at being ordered about like that before Al Loär, and this alone gave him courage to hold his ground. A silence pregnant with much thunder reigned for a short minute.

"Now, then!" M. Kornog said, at last, in a tone indicative of a complete indifference as to how his words would be received. "What are you waiting for Toulouzek? Do you imagine that I am going to repeat my order?" And as the man still hesitated a muscular hand shot out, wrenched away the bottle, and sent it spinning through the air like a football all the way down the incline, to burst like a bubble at the very foot of the winding path.

Al Loär, unable to master his indignation any longer, stepped into the open, his broad, apoplectic face glowing in the gray morning light like the rising moon it so closely resembled, objurgations of a very emphatic nature bursting from his coarse mouth. He was an ugly customer when aroused, and even his inbred Breton respect for a soutane was for the moment forgotten.

"You can't come and lord it over my customers here," he cried, squaring a powerful, well-braced frame threateningly at the Curé. "We're not in the sacristy, and—" But his sentence was never finished, for M. Kornog, stepping back with one foot to obtain a surer leverage, as quick as lightning lifted him from the ground, swung him round, and literally let him fly over his own wall. The inevitable door-yard heap of soft manure chanced to lie conveniently near, and into it he went head-first without a sound.

"That's for your impudence!" the Curé quietly remarked, readjusting his wristbands, "and if you want some more—!" he added, as Al Loär, spluttering and



AL LOÄR'S LITTLE WAYSIDE INN



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spitting strenuously, rolled himself free from the malodorous mound. But apparently a second dose was not required, for no word came from the wholly shamed and conquered bully . . . and as for Toulouzek, all that could still be seen of him was a pair of swiftly-escaping legs at a friendly gap in the stake hedge.

"And to think," meditated the Curé, resuming his way towards home, "and to think that no other form of argument will touch men of that sort! Where does sacerdotal authority come in, if it is not backed by strong biceps?" he continued, sadly, to himself, for he was already tormented with remorse at his own violence. "If I was not so worn out, anyhow," he concluded, naïvely, "I would not have been so quick to resent their nonsense, for they are not bad-hearted, not bad-hearted in the least . . . a little *mauvaise-tête*, that is all! And really now that I come to think of it, I *was* a little too swift to take offence! But the death of my poor Hervé upset me more than anything I can recall for a long time . . . it's a pity, a cruel pity!" There the Curé's soliloquy came to an end, for the door of his "peaceful" little home was opening before him, and Dame Mari-Gwezek on the threshold stood ready to vituperate anew, if he could judge by the extreme concentration of her thousand and one wrinkles.

## CHAPTER VI

Yon water-marks that writhe and twist  
In broken bands of amethyst  
Or sidelong shift and spread,  
Trace even to the harbor-wall  
A deep full current that men call  
The Highway of the Dead.

In with the flood its noiseless sweep  
Draws half the pulses of the deep  
To one resistless force.  
Needs must the race be strong and swift,  
The silent riders of the drift  
Will brook no calmer course.

Eyeless and faceless, wound in weed,  
(Oh, messengers of grief, indeed!)  
They seek the homeward strand,  
Turning—ah! turning, ghastly slow!  
Here gleams a brow, and there doth show  
A blue and deathly hand!

But grimmer is the sight at noon  
Of night, beneath the blood-red moon  
When from a distant loss,  
Gray ghosts upon the sliding foam  
Come praying peaceful rest and home  
Beneath the Buried Cross.

M. M.

LANÄIK mechanically pushed the earthenware pan in which she was boiling potatoes for dinner nearer to the smouldering turf, and sat contemplating it with tear-filled eyes. Potatoes! Was that a dinner to put before Pierrek, when, tired and hungry, he would come running

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home from the harbor, where he was at work painting and repairing the *Stéréden* in view of the coming sardine season. What must Hervé think of her if, as she firmly believed, he was even now close by her side? Involuntarily she said, half aloud, in the monotonous voice of one but scarcely awake:

“It isn’t my fault, Hoärvé-*Karantez!*”<sup>1</sup> (It sounded like a remark made for the purpose of filling up an unbearable silence.) “It isn’t my fault! You cannot imagine how difficult everything is now!” In her own peculiar, dreamy way she reached for the salt, threw a few pinches over the bubbling potatoes, and sat back wearily on her low chair beneath the broad hearth-mantel, seeming, what with the listlessness of her pose and the clear pallor of her face, scarcely to belong to real life. “Pierrek does what he can,” she continued, plaintively, but at sixteen how is a poor *paotr*<sup>2</sup> to know. The fishing, too, was bad this winter, Hoärvé, and they say that sardines will be few. . . .” She stopped with a little sob, raised her hand to her snowy coiffe, as if recollecting something, and sat looking sideways at a warm ray of sunshine dancing gayly in at the half-open window through a veil of budding white roses and tender green spring leafage. Noon was approaching, and she felt that she should be busy with other preparations for Pierrek’s return, but she did not seem to like the task to-day, and it was only after a painful hesitation that she at last left her dark, cosey corner and crossed over to the dresser in search of plates and glasses. After a little she turned from the table, walked towards the door, and stood just within it, gazing out upon the pebbly lane where until last autumn she had always watched for her Hervé.

<sup>1</sup> Hervé-my-well-beloved.

<sup>2</sup> Lad.

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Pierrek himself was just then hurrying up the wide village street, along one side of which a crowd of fishing-boats were moored, lazily bumping with the slowly rising tide against the low granite quay.

The boy had grown almost beyond recognition; indeed, his height and splendid bearing made him a most striking figure. He was not quite seventeen yet, but still a singular power and self-reliance were expressed in all his actions, owing, doubtless, to the possession of that superior nerve which had stood him in such good stead at different epochs of his young life.

It was already after mid-day, for which fact M. Kornog's big church clock loudly gave its word by striking a quarter past, far up in the silvery haze hanging to the cliff's lip, and therefore it was at a run that the lad turned up his own lane.

As he approached the little cottage he saw his mother leaning languidly against the gray door-lintel, and, still increasing his pace, came upon her before she had time to dry the tears hanging to her golden eyelashes.

"You mustn't do that!" he said, bluntly, putting one brown hand on her slender, black-draped shoulder, and for a second there shone in the clear velvet of his eyes a glowing depth of tenderness that made her heart leap within her breast, but she said nothing, and walked past him into the house.

"You know," she murmured at last, when the lad had taken his seat at the table, and according to Breton custom she had carried her porringer half full of steaming potatoes and fresh milk to the hearth-step, where she sat toying with her wooden spoon, "you know, my son, that there is hardly any money left in the *bahut*."

"What matter! What matter!" Pierrek said, indiffer-



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ently, between mouthfuls, "I will earn some more . . . that's simple!"

"Very," acquiesced Lanäik; "it is only when you find you can't earn much more that things will get complicated."

Pierrek laughed. "You are a very unkind mother, and a great unbeliever," he remarked, cutting himself a huge slice of hard bread from the brown loaf at his elbow, and cheerfully cracking it between his splended white teeth.

Lanäik did not answer. She was thinking of the difficult times ahead should the sardines really fail this summer, and a great wave of apprehension flooded her heart. She shook her dainty head forebodingly as she rose to clear away the table, for she was in a singularly pessimistic mood, and lacked the stamina necessary to react against her ever-increasing yearning for her dead husband.

"Is there no news of the *Gwellan-Mignon*?" she asked, presently, stopping close to where Pierrek swung backward and forward on the hind legs of his chair to rest himself after eating. The *Gwellan-Mignon* was her brother-in-law's schooner, a fine new coaster plying its trade between Nantes and the smaller seaports of Finis-terre, year in year out, with various cargoes.

Pierrek's bright face instantly clouded. "No!" he said, impatiently. "There is not, *Mammik*, but don't worry; Uncle Oän is the best sailor in Kermarioker . . . now," he finished, thinking of his father, and tears rose again to Lanäik's eyes. "Still," he resumed, after an instant's silence, during which he had crossed over to the other side of the room and unslung from the wall the model of a little sloop-of-war he had himself constructed with wonderful dexterity during the long sad evenings of

the preceding winter, "still one can never know." One of the mizzen-yards needed reinforcement, and his clever fingers had just begun this delicate and intricate bit of work, when the half-door was pushed open, and the Curé of Kermarioker walked in, fanning himself with his wide-leaved hat, the sun being unusually warm for the first days of April.

"Ah! my children," he said, taking the chair proffered by the courtesying Lanäik, and sitting down rather wearily, "I am glad to find you here together." He glanced at them beneath his brows and paused, carefully dusting his sleeve, which, by-the-way, was speckless. A short silence followed, weighted with the suggestion of calamity, and Lanäik looked up at him with the eyes of one in mortal fear. Although not glancing in her direction at all the priest noticed this, and in a tone utterly at variance with his attitude, said, gayly:

"This boy here seems to be a man of action," and he pointed over his shoulder at Pierrek, who was eagerly watching him. "I just had a look at the *Stérédén*, and nothing could be more satisfactory than the way in which she is being rejuvenated . . . yes, assuredly Pierrek will be one of those men who get on in the world. There is in the universe—believe me, Lanäik—a particular spot for each man. For Pierrek this spot is a boat, big or small, but always a boat! Life would be much simpler if people would recognize, as he has done, where their own particular spots are to be found."

Pierrek was smiling rather grimly. He unconsciously realized that all this verbiage, so different from his patron's usual brevity of speech, concealed something serious. Lanäik, on the other hand, far less discerning than her boy, showed visible relief. Her whole counte-

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nance had relaxed, and she, too, was smiling now, but in a different way.

"Surely, Monsieur le Recteur," she interposed, "what they say about the sardines is not true. What will become of us if it is?"

M. Kornog shrugged his shoulders. "In these times one is almost compelled to suspect one's nearest friends," he answered, lightly. "Our best and nearest friends here in Kermarioker, I take it, are, generally speaking, the sardines, and appearances have been against them for one or two seasons, but that is no reason why they should not recant and visit us as usual."

"And if they do not," Pierrek put in, quietly, "*Mammik* need not worry. As I told her a while ago, I can always make money otherwise."

"Then," cried the Curé, rising to his feet with what might perhaps have been termed a rather overdone assumption of gayety, "you have but to look forward to being surprised agreeably, my little Lanäik, whether the recreant sardines appear upon the scene or not!" He tapped Pierrek on the shoulder with good-natured playfulness, and with a laugh and a nod went towards the door. "Whether they come or not," he repeated, stopping on the threshold to say, casually, "Aren't you going to work, too, *Moussaillon*? We can navigate as far as the quay in company, if you wish."

When they had gone Lanäik remained standing in the middle of the room, waiting for she knew not what. She had lately spent a great part of her existence in waiting for things intangible, and her thoughts drifted desperately to the veiled threat hidden behind Pierrek's last words. If the sardine season was bad, she was aware that next spring this son of hers (all she had left now in the world to love) would insist on joining the more re-

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munerative cod-fishing trade . . . and then! Her hands and feet grew cold at the bare idea, and she shuddered involuntarily. "I must work," she said to herself, and took two steps towards the spinning-wheel ready laden with flax under the window, but as she was bending to draw her little bench forward Pierrek re-entered, his eyes wide with some nameless horror, his face pale and suddenly drawn under its tan. Bretons have a great dread of anything approaching a scene, and Lanäik stood perfectly still, holding herself in a control that was pencilling deep lines between her brows and at the corners of her white lips.

"Oän-Gweled?" she whispered, bending a little towards her son. "I thought there was something . . . is he . . . ?"

"No! no!" Pierrek interrupted, angrily. "Not that, but the Syndic has had news that the mizzen-mast, the dinghy, and the wheel of the *Gwellan-Mignon* have been picked up floating twelve miles from here, and Monsieur le Recteur thought best that I should tell you."

Lanäik made no outcry. This was the shipwreck ever present to the mind of Breton women, the warningless misfortune they all expect sooner or later. Since two or three days she had feared it, for a great storm had swept up the coast, coming from the mouth of the Loire. She merely closed her eyes and dropped to her knees, covering her face with her clasped hands, while Pierrek stood a little behind her, unconsciously breaking into tiny pieces the delicate main-mast of his cherished little war-sloop.

\* \* \* \* \*

For nine long days and nights the friends of Oän-Gweled had taken each his turn at watching from the look-out rock of Tri-bezek for the reappearance of his

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corpse. Unweariedly they had kept their mournful vigil, gazing with keen, sea-trained eyes at the zebra-like streakings of the fierce Ann-Dinäou current, the path that drowned men take when drifting home. All hope, however, must now be abandoned, for it is almost without precedent that this fated period of nine days should be overstepped by the silent voyagers of the drift, and Pierrek coming home after his six hours' watch on the Tri-bezek sadly informed his mother that that very night the *proella*<sup>1</sup> would take place at the home of the dead, a comfortable stone house which once had been a manor, and stood perched vulture-like on the top-most ridge of a jagged morne on the other side of ruined Kermario.

Shortly afterwards Lanäik, occupied in taking from her great, silver-hinged press Pierrek's and her own best garments, heard the "announcers" stop at her door. They were four stalwart fishermen, old friends of Hervé, and there they stood bareheaded, draped in their long circular mourning cloaks that drooped nearly to their feet when the violent wind that had arisen at dawn did not whirl them like the sails of a dismantled boat about their tall forms.

"Peace and prosperity to all those who dwell here!" they chorused, in deep sea-voices that echoed lamentably within her lonely little home. "Pray for the miserable soul of Oän-Gweled that still hovers above the raging deep! The venerated widow of the deceased invites you to be present at the *Nosvez-an-Anaon*<sup>2</sup> that will take place to-night, as also to attend the interment of the cross to-morrow morning punctually at ten!"

The dirgelike plaint died away with the heavy tramp

<sup>1</sup> A strange simulacrum of funeral rites which is supposed to lay the spirit of the unrecovered drowned.      <sup>2</sup> Vigil of Souls.

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of four pairs of feet redescending towards the village, and Lanäik burst into hopeless sobs.

Truly that night the elements themselves seemed desirous of taking part in the general mourning, for it was a veritable *danse macabre* that wind and waves rendered as they met below the cliffs, a swift, harsh rhythm, amid which some invisible gallop of skeletons struck a shriller note when the more ponderous orchestra of the storm paused a second to take breath.

Long files of sable-clad people, carrying horn lanterns to light them on their dangerous way, were already heading for the widow's house when Pierrek and Lanäik caught up with them. The lad's tall, straight form was instantly recognized, even in that gloom, and way was made for him and his bitterly-weeping little mother, since, as nearest relatives of the deceased, they must head the procession.

Never had poor Lanäik felt so absolutely at the end of her courage. Was there nothing but misfortune in the world then? Here she was widowed at thirty-four, her life practically at an end, her heart broken past all consolation, and now her sister-in-law, a sweet-faced woman from the poetic coast of the Baie d'Audierne, was left alone, too, and desolate, with four babies to bring up. "Oh! the sea, the cruel thief!" she murmured, turning her whole quivering body from the showers of spray flying before the wind, and buffeting the file of mourners creeping at a snail's pace along the dizzy cliff-path. Pierrek had thrown a protecting arm about her, and she clung helplessly to him, determined to implore him once more to-night to renounce forever his plans concerning the *grande pêche Islandaise*. Stubbornly for so yielding a nature as hers, she hung back a little as they came in sight of the lighted windows of the ancient dwelling that

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Oän-Gweled had left with so light a heart barely two weeks ago, never to see again. But Pierrek, as though guessing the cause of this sudden recoil, led her on, and she found it so impossible to resist the firm, loving pressure of that strong young arm, that once again she weakened and suffered herself to be drawn to the entrance, draped for the occasion with two fluttering deep-red sails that looked as black as the night itself in the flickering, gust-shaken glare of two ship's lanterns hanging to the lintel. Pushed onward by the stamping crowd behind, flustered by the tempest, and firmly urged by Pierrek's encircling arm, the slender woman had no choice but to enter, once more robbed of her opportunity, and very sore at heart.

A large portion of the company was already assembled within, the women kneeling, rosary in hand, the men standing behind them with devoutly bent heads, murmuring responses to the droning recital of the prayers for the dead. As Lanäik and Pierrek threaded their way through the crowd a trembling old voice was reciting: "*De profundis clamavi ad te Domine: Domine exaudi vocem meam,*" and they were just in time to reply with a heartfelt "Amen" before room was made for them, and they found themselves in the middle of the room, still side by side.

There on the massive table, covered with a white sheet, lay extended on an armful of delicate fern-fronds a plain cross of unvarnished wood, bearing the name of the departed in black lettering. Tall blessed candles in shining brass holders were grouped around it, while carefully disposed at the foot of the cross were poor Oän-Gweled's blue jersey, his crimson neckerchief of rich silk, his pipe and tobacco-pouch, his long-bladed knife, still attached to one of those complicated lanyards that sailors take

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such pride in plaiting, and finally a photograph taken years ago when he had been one of the smartest topmen on the frigate *Ariane*, a poor little picture that looked drowned, too, and very, exceedingly, dead, in its tiny frame of faded velvet.

Bowing low before this pathetic collection, Pierrek took from the plate where it reposed in holy-water a branch of green sea-weed, and after reverently sprinkling the cross, and murmuring the customary *Requiescat in Pace*, he passed on to make room for his mother.

"Come and salute the widow," some one whispered at his elbow. He turned, to find the Master of Ceremonies, a white-haired fisherman, whose bearing under these trying circumstances had the finished courtesy of a born diplomat—fortunately, since the etiquette of such ceremonies is as punctilious in primitive Finisterre as that of any court in Europe. Following him closely, Pierrek edged half-way round the table, and stopped in front of a truly appalling figure, crouching so close to what is technically called the "funeral tressel," that the rigid folds of the impenetrable black draperies enwrapping it touched the verdure-edged cross. This was Lizik Gweled, the tender, mirth-loving Aunt Lizik with whom he had so often laughed and joked, and who now, her head and face entirely shrouded by the drooping hood, her thin hands clasped within her broad, monkish sleeves, seemed some mysteriously-veiled presentment of death. She had not moved once since the beginning of the evening, and it was merely by an almost imperceptible inclination that she acknowledged the low-voiced formula of introduction with which, according to a very ancient custom, each new sympathizer is ceremoniously presented. Pierrek shuddered and retreated as precipitately as politeness would permit from this ghastly black pyra-



mid, which it seemed to him must surely hide a total stranger rather than a near and dearly-loved relative, and almost backed into the irascible Mari-Gwezek, *Voceratrice* of Kermarioker when occasion required, and otherwise housekeeper and house tyrant of its devoted Curé.

She was a singular character, this Mari - Gwezek, protean almost in her many moods and avocations, the least curious of which was certainly not the one she was about to fulfil. Her delicately-wrinkled face seemed almost smooth to-night, her youthful blue eyes were half closed in an ecstasy of religious fervor, and her narrow, exquisitely-chiselled features wore a light that no one outside of such moments had ever seen reflected there. This, nevertheless, was the woman who lorded it ruthlessly over her own particular *Monsieur Prêtre*, and dared to pit her small strength against the hardened sinews of any loafer coming to beg at the Curé's door after swallowing overmuch cider—routing them, too, in every case. But to-night all this side of her strange personality had been doffed, and when looking at her it became possible to believe implicitly in the weird gifts with which she was credited for many miles around. Her eloquence at least was indisputable, and as she took her stand at the head of the tressel a silence so profound as to be almost uncanny amid so great a gathering replaced the low murmurs and whisperings, that reminded one of an overcrowded bee-hive.

Pierrek would have given much could he have been spared what he knew only too well was to follow. The very thought of his uncle Oän had become horrible to the overwrought lad, young giant though he was, and every time his name was pronounced, or the manner of his death alluded to, he could not help remembering the sight he had beheld only a few weeks before, when a

## GRAY MIST

ghastly shape had drifted close to the gunwale of the *Stéréden*, over which he was lounging. A shape already faceless, upon which a multitude of devouring things crawled with crab legs, or clung by tiny suckers and tentacles to mouldering remnants of clothing visible here and there through the far-streaming shroud of gray weed. Nausea had overtaken him, and when Nédélék Houarn, recognizing on the half-rotten left sleeve the private cipher with which every Breton wife marks the working-clothes of her man as a precaution against the last and most terrible loss of all, had vainly tried to gaff the mangled corpse of poor little Melan-Olier's husband, the young owner of the *Stéréden* had turned away in disgust, hiding his eyes beneath his folded arms. Was his uncle already like that? With a gulp he awoke from this waking nightmare to hear Mari-Gwezek beginning her impassioned eulogy of the dead, in a deep-chested, sonorous voice that she reserved for such improvisations only:

"The wicked waters have robbed us of your body, O Oän-Gweled, best of friends, tenderest of husbands and fathers . . ." she was saying, or, rather, chanting, for her diction was strictly rhythmical and cadenced. "Your soul, however, evoked by our prayers, is here—is it not so, Oän-Gweled? . . . So in pity give us a sign of your presence among us, manifest yourself to those here assembled, or, if not to all, at least to that poor woman, your widow, who loves you as the Saints prescribe, even beyond death's portals. . . ." Here the hitherto immovable figure in its stiff draperies of woe swayed forward, the shrouded head fell heavily upon the pale-tinted fringe of ferns, and Lizik Gweled broke into those heart-tearing sobs of the ordinarily undemonstrative which seem to wrench a wretched human frame asunder.

With a smothered execration Pierrek shouldered himself

out of his immediate entourage. No! He would certainly not stay and see this crucifixion to the end. Never mind what that ultra-decorous assembly of relatives and friends thought of him! Out he was going, and that at once!

Unfortunately, the space closest to the door was crammed to suffocation, and he was forced to pause once more, with the soul-stirring plaint of the *Voceratrice* ringing unbearably in his ears. "Your soul, O Oän-Gweled! is now by the strength of our supplications incorporate with this cross, that to-morrow we shall inter where your body would have been but for the cruelty of the sea! Bid us farewell for a time, beloved friend that we have lost . . . we entreat you . . . manifest yourself to us who know that you are here!" Here her voice sank to such sonorities of passionate appeal, and aroused such strange and uncomfortable echoes in the roof, that the whole assemblage swayed with the same shudder, many bursting out into sobs and groans indescribably nerve-racking and oppressive. Pierrek, maddened beyond endurance, once more attempted to reach the head of the shallow steps descending from the main room to the curiously jutting porch before the door, but stopped with a sudden gasp.

There, right in front of him, in a dusky nook of the ancient gray wall, like a saint in her niche, stood the most marvellous little apparition he had ever seen. She combined, it seemed to him at one glance, all the perfections of the women of his race. Exquisitely formed, with slight square shoulders, and as straight as an arrow, she might possibly be fifteen, but not much over that. She wore the picturesque costume of Kastel-ar-Veur, a village of Enez-Pers,<sup>1</sup> an island some twenty-five miles

<sup>1</sup> Azure Island.

## GRAY MIST

distant from Kermarioker. Behind such eyes as hers nothing but a soul pure as crystal could dwell. Daring and demure, innocent and tantalizing at one and the same time, they changed color with every passing impression; just now in the semi-darkness from which they peeped they seemed as green as two bright emeralds, but no doubt by daylight they might fade to the softer tints of beryl. The delicate features were perfectly chiselled, and the hair, in this case a crowning glory indeed, sparkled beneath her lace-edged coiffe where it caught the distant gleam of the candles, in a kind of crinkly iridescence like threads of pure red gold.

Who could she be, Pierrek asked himself, gazing like one hypnotized at the small figure in the niche, and why had he never seen her at either Fair or *Pardon*? She, however, evidently resented his unduly prolonged scrutiny, for a flush began to rise upon her smooth cheeks, and suddenly from beneath her dark lashes what he thought the fiercest eyes it had ever been his lot to see shining from a human face transfixed him. Trembling with confusion and anger, he literally sprang over the bowed shoulders of some men kneeling beside him and rushed out.

## CHAPTER VII

When Love is young, the livelong day  
Between December swings and May;  
Naught happens but to run askew,  
And roses intertwine with rue  
Till wits are like to go astray.

Nor aught availeth it to say,  
"Thus will I!" Fate doth block the way,  
And what you will not that you do,  
When Love is young.

O bright and fleet as ocean spray!  
O memories that mock decay!  
O Youth, beware, and take thy due!  
Lest thou regret when hours are few  
And grates the spade amid the clay,  
When Love was young.

M. M.

THE village of Kastel-ar-Veur, on Enez-Pers, lies within sight—on very clear days that is—of the twin peaks between which nestles Kermarioker. A wild and dangerous stretch of water separates it from the main-land, and it is whispered that a vast smuggled commerce radiates from the island, one of the most poetically beautiful in all Brittany!

Whether this is strictly true or not, the fact remains that the inhabitants of Enez-Pers are as fierce and unsociable as can well be imagined. A fine-looking set of men, and of very lovely women, clean, honest, and smart exceedingly, they nevertheless happen to be, as just mentioned, peculiarly shy of strangers.

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Kastel-ar-Veur,<sup>1</sup> the well-named, is much more than wave-sequestered, for on three sides of the plateau on which it is perched cliffs of an extraordinary dark-sapphire blue, polished by the assault of the billows well-nigh to the brilliancy of the gem itself, fall a sheer three hundred feet to the jagged belt of rocks that breast the Atlantic surge. About a mile beyond the village lies a curious-looking property. It commands one of the most wonderful views in this wild island of unrivalled prospects, and its garden and orchard extend upon a spur thrown against the falaise as a buttress might possibly be thrown against the very summit of a tower. The whole property is surrounded by an indestructible wall, twelve feet high by six feet thick, so conscientiously loop-holed and reinforced that there can be no doubt of its having once been a seignorial stronghold. Within those massive fortifications stands a plain house of stone, flanked by a wind-mill on one side and a sundial on the other. Whatever it may have been in olden days, it is now a farm, pure and simple, with only a remnant of carving here and there above window or door, and a steep-pitched roof of blue slate to betray its nobler origin. The garden surrounding it is an irregular nook, rich with deep color, for the climate of Enez-Pers, though stormy, is so extraordinarily mild that a rather hardy species of palm flourishes out-of-doors the year round, and camellias, fuchsias, myrtles, pomegranates, and giant geraniums make a gay blaze in the sun, and sweeten the sharpness of the saline breezes that sweep continually above, like the constant fanning of enormous wings.

This plot of fertile ground was scrupulously neat always, and denoted the care of a skilled and loving hand.

<sup>1</sup> Castle-of-the-Waves.

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All the little pathways were paved with a multicolored gravel, made of finely-broken shells, and not a single weed showed among the flowers. In one corner throve what the little owner of this blossoming empire called her time-keeper, for by a peculiarly happy inspiration—instant one might almost say in this case—she had grouped there a number of plants that actually marked the passage of the hours. Before sunup the ipomæas unclosed their petals, this example being followed a little later by some very beautiful Iceland poppies, delicately gilded, like church chalices. These were in turn followed by the awakening of the *Belles de Jour*, the *Dames d'onze heures*, the saffron-hued marigolds, and the snowy Stars of Bethlehem. Still later on the graceful march was continued by velvety evening primroses, *Belles de Nuit* of deepest cerulean blue, and at last brought to a triumphant finale, as night regained her domain, by the glorious opening of the queen of all these beauties—a sort of cactus, evidently belonging to the family of the “*Cereus grandiflorus*,” which, enthroned in a square green tub, lorded it most haughtily over its humbler companions. This delicious bloom of a silvery pink, perfuming the whole night, was to Fäik<sup>1</sup> Karádek a never-ceasing wonder, and ever since a sailor cousin had brought back to her from distant tropic lands the little cutting from which it had developed, it had been the pride of her young heart.

To-day, with tucked-up gown and bare arms, she was working busily in this delightful enclosure, raising her lovely head, however, often enough to search the cloudless but ever-slightly hazy sky for the tiny lark trilling down to her from the softened blue. Near at hand, in the carefully-kept vegetable-garden, where nourishing

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Fah-eek.

## GRAY MIST

roots and herbs grew in profusion, her uncle, old Tad Karádek, the miller of Kastel-ar-Veur, was plying rake and hoe with extreme industry. A very tall, spare man, this Tad Karádek, hollow of cheek and sharp of countenance, as well as of intellect. His most remarkable characteristic, however, was the singular keenness of his eyes, reminding one involuntarily of a suddenly unhooded hawk, and suggesting emotional possibilities, though his face was that of a thoroughly unemotional person verging on the taciturn.

"Fäik," he suddenly called, resting his arms on his reversed rake as though upon a railing, and turned his head in her direction, "I understand that you had a very pleasant time during your visit to the main-land. Why don't you say something about it? Come here and tell me who you saw there!"

The girl advanced across the band of velvety grass separating them, and took her stand beside the mossy old sundial close to the onion-patch her uncle had been weeding.

"Let me see," the old man continued, without giving her time to begin her story, "you were there four days, were you not?"

"Yes, Uncle Gwion,<sup>1</sup> four days," Fäik answered, like an echo. "But I don't know why you should think that I had a pleasant time, because I didn't!"

"Ah! And what was it that displeased you, my daughter?"

"Well, for one thing, *Moéreb*<sup>2</sup> Guénèk took me to Oän-Gweled's *proella*, and it was dreadful. I could not sleep for two nights for thinking of it!"

"So? I am sorry. You should not be so easily upset,

<sup>1</sup> Breton for Guy.

<sup>2</sup> Aunt.



## GRAY MIST

Fäik. It is very bad for the health, and you are getting too old to be frightened at a simple little ceremony like that!" Not a muscle of the grim old countenance had moved, nor did Tad<sup>1</sup> Karádek look at the girl while speaking to her. He appeared, however, to be watching her slim, sunburned hands, which were moving nervously upon the shining surface of her pale-blue apron.

"My daughter," he resumed, smoothly, "it seems to me somehow that there is still something you do not relate. I have known you too long not to notice that since your return you have not been quite yourself. Don't you like the people of Kermarioker?"

Fäik moved a little closer, and crossed her hands one over the other on the top of the sundial before answering.

"They are not much like our people here!" she said, after a pause, with a little laugh.

"No," Gwion Karádek remarked, meditatively, "to be sure not. They are a different race, strong and well enough of their kind; well enough, but foolish in the way they do business . . . not a scrap of initiative or enterprise, and a little dull too; is it not so? It is over twenty years since I went over to Kermarioker you know."

"Perhaps you are right, Tadik.<sup>2</sup> I don't know."

For some moments the old man said nothing. He was evidently thinking deeply, and his piercing eyes were fixed upon a shaggy clump of fennel with an inscrutable immobility that this savory herb scarcely deserved. Once he glanced slowly towards his little niece, leaning half across the sun-dial, still with downcast eyes and interlocked fingers, but instantly returned to his contemplation of the fennel.

<sup>1</sup> Father.

<sup>2</sup> Little Father.

## GRAY MIST

"I know them well," he returned at last, speculatively. "Some of them I esteemed highly indeed, Oän-Gweled among others, and his half-brother, Hoärvé Rouzik—a sailor, that one, such as we don't often find nowadays. . . ." Here he stopped again, and passed his long, thin hand across his eyes, as though the sun-rays dancing over the onion-patch were dazzling his sight, and in doing so he glanced again unobtrusively at Fäik. "By-the-way," he concluded, in a lighter manner, almost amounting to indifference, "did you see anything of the Rouziks? Lanäik, poor child, was once a beauty. I dare say, however, that she is sadly changed now!"

A very slight flush, no pinker than the heart of a blush rose, crept slowly into the girl's rounded cheeks.

"Yes, I saw *Itron*<sup>1</sup> Lanäik at her brother-in-law's *proella*. She is still very beautiful—*very*," she added, with conviction, "and you can't imagine how young she looks, hardly older than . . ." She stopped abruptly, and Gwion Karádek suddenly turned his rake right end upward once more, and drew it over a few weeds scattered along the row nearest to him.

"She has a boy, hasn't she?" he remarked, innocently, his back to the girl, and assiduously hooking more wilted weeds. "Almost grown up now, I should say. Did you see him too?"

Fäik frowned, and tilted her straight little nose imperiously into the air. "Oh! yes, I saw him!" she said, in a way that did not have the slightest resemblance to her former manner. "He's no boy at all, Tad Gwion! I'd call him an ill-mannered bear, if I wished to speak of him at all!"

The worthy miller turned around, genuinely astonished

<sup>1</sup> Madame.

## GRAY MIST

this time. "Softly, softly, my girl!" he said, reprovingly. "Surely you must be mistaken, for the Rouziks have always been proper people, from father to son, and I cannot believe that this one has given you cause for speaking as you do."

Poor Fäik collapsed, more at the justice of the reproach than at the tone, which had been neither severe nor unfriendly, and began to excuse herself.

"I meant no harm," she stammered, crimson now with confusion. "He seemed bold and . . . awkward to me . . . he has such big owl's eyes, and such brusque ways. But—excuse me, Tadik, I must go and see whether the milk is ready to skim, else *Moéreb-goz*<sup>1</sup> will scold me!" And with a birdlike flirt of her petticoats she was gone.

Left alone, Tad Karádek began slowly to pace backward and forward from the onion-patch to a broad opening in the northern wall, all garlanded with shining ivy, through which the eye embraced one of those marvellous heaths of Brittany where, above swelling waves of pink and purple, myriad plumes of golden-flowered genesta courtesy with every touch of the breeze. To the left cornfields and vineyards, interspersed with fig and almond trees growing amid the wheat, sloped gently down towards a square-towered church, while on the right the heath rose in soft gradations to where ponderous groups of Druidical stones, both dolmens and menhirs, all girdled deep with thickets of blackberry, were gauntly profiled above the uttermost cape of the island.

"*Ac 'han ta!*"<sup>2</sup> he said, half aloud, stopping in the midst of his fifteenth turn. "So Mother was right, as usual, and Fäik seems to have met her fate! That's the

<sup>1</sup> Great-aunt.

<sup>2</sup> Eh bien donc! (Eh! now then!)

## GRAY MIST

way with our girls: when they resent admiration it's because they're hit!" He resumed his quarter-decking promenade with a little sigh that was half a laugh, still muttering to himself. "Mother's got sharp eyes, for all her seventy-five years . . . and sharp ears, too. I must ask her again what it was she heard the lad say to Nédèlék Houarn on the way home from the ceremony. . . . Yes, I'll have to ask her."

Sharp ears and eyes *Moéreb-goz* Tinäik certainly had. Indeed, this estimable dame with the compressed, thin-lipped mouth, the scarcely-wrinkled face, and the cold, pale-gray eyes, was a personality not to be disregarded. She was just then constantly glancing at her grandniece down the length of the cool dairy, where they were both working. This useful apartment was of a cleanliness that would have shamed even a Dutch Vrouw, and with its pale-green walls, painted freshly every year, its two long windows looking out upon a flagged yard, in the exact centre of which yawned an old-fashioned stone well from which the purest and coldest drinking-water on Enez-Pers was drawn, it was somehow or other typical of *Moéreb-goz* Tinäik herself, grim, polished, cold, and uncompromising.

Fäik, bending over a pan of milk, was idly tapping a long-handled wooden spoon against its rim, and evidently thinking not at all of the work before her, for her extraordinary eyes had a fixed, far-away look wholly incompatible with housekeeping duties. Dame Tinäik, essentially a woman of action, quietly put down the snowy cloth with which she had been drying the newly-washed churn, and walked swiftly and noiselessly across the dairy. She had been on her feet all the morning, hurrying hither and thither over the whole domain, interfering with the laborers' easy-going fashion of doing work, and

ordering the wenches about with that boundless capacity for action and contempt for inefficiency so peculiarly her own, but she was not in the least tired, and from the exquisitely-broidered edge of her batiste head-band, to the scrupulously-varnished tips of her narrow black sabots, she was a picture of idealized neatness.

Fäik made an involuntary movement of impatience as her great-aunt touched her on the shoulder. It was hateful to be thus awakened from her pleasant little dream, and besides, although she dearly loved Dame Tinäik, that venerable person had an imperious way which invariably aroused a spirit of opposition in herself.

"Well, *Moéreb-goz*," she said, a little nervously, "what is it?"

"It is," the old woman answered, dryly, "that you have only one hour left to skim all these pans, and at the rate you are advancing that will prove insufficient!"

Fäik bit her lip impatiently, watching the thin brown fingers deftly tilting the first pan back and forth, and offered not a word of comment, acquiescence, or objection.

"Your work has been very unsatisfactorily done since our return from Kermarioker, and I do not intend that it should continue to be so. Oh! you need not toss your head like that, I assure you! I quite mean what I say. Nor need you think that I won't know how to make you mind my words, because I seldom fail in that respect with anybody. And remember that idleness is the mother of all sins."

Idle! she, Fäik! Her pretty face grew quite white with anger at the accusation. No, she was not idle, as her acid great-aunt very well knew; she was, on the contrary, a model of industry as a rule, but she needed

## GRAY MIST

to be roused just now, and Dame Tinäik, who had a singular faculty for probing at one glance the deepest depths of a riddle, and of tearing the heart out of it, ignoring with supreme generalship all possible side issues, had pounced, as it were, on the central thread—the girl's extreme pride — to successfully achieve her aim. Not only was the milk superiorly skimmed some minutes before the appointed time, but several other neglected duties were attended to, and by three o'clock, having removed her working apron and smoothed her lace coiffe which never needed smoothing, Fäik was on her way to the village to do some urgent errands.

This little village of Kastel-ar-Veur is one of the most picturesque to be found in that part of Brittany. You come upon it suddenly at the end of a narrow road sunk between two towering hedges of thorny whin and giant ferns of an exceedingly appetizing green, and the antiquity and irregularity of its thatched granite houses, each surrounded by a strip of well-cared-for garden, claims instant approval. No two buildings are quite alike, and yet they all display a family resemblance, a common air of solidity and calm security which a wooden or even a brick homestead can never hope to achieve. There are ideal clipped box hedges here and there, and even the little gray inn at the lower end of the High Street—a simple flat road, deserving neither of these appellations—is bowered in variegated spindle-trees, and pink-tufted feathery-foliaged tamarisks that would make an artist's mouth water—were artists ever allowed to land on Enez-Pers!

After doing her errands, Fäik went down, her basket on her arm, towards the harbor—nothing more nor less than a bite taken out of the towering crags by Nature during some prehistoric convulsion—the abrupt sides of

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which are dotted with stone-pines of extreme age, red-trunked and flat of top, like great, fuzzy umbrellas. Beneath their checkered shade, cascades of heather, dammed up here and there by tall ridges of sturdy foxgloves, fall to the very edge of the sands, and these two rose-colored slopes half-enclosing the pale-gold of the narrow beach and the soft brilliance of the sea, seem something rare and precious, reposeful to the eye after the habitual gray and emerald and silver of Breton coast-views.

Slowly Fäik followed the white hem of the incoming sea, walking by preference on the firm damp sand smoothed and pressed down by the last tide, and after a little came to a particularly deserted stretch of shore which she must traverse in order to reach the place whither the last of her errands called her—the funny little dwelling of a lobster fisher, where her great-aunt was in the habit of sending her every Thursday afternoon in search of this delicacy. On Friday the House of Karádek “fasted” on *Soupe de homard aux six herbes*, and there are worse things than that!

Half-way across, the girl stopped short to look at a *chaloupe* stranded upon the sand, with inclined hull, which the swiftly gaining little waves were beginning to surround again. Fäik bent to read the name lettered in white on the stern, being always curious of things maritime, and considering her uncle’s pretty farm and prosperous little mill quite an exile to a sailor’s daughter like herself.

“*Stéréden-Ab-Vor*,” she read, with a little, pleased smile. It was a pretty name, she thought, and was about to resume her way, when a fresh young voice said, gayly, at her back:

“Want to embark, *Vamezel* ?”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle or demoiselle.

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Fäik swung round on her tiny sabots with a sharp exclamation, her eyes positively shooting forth green flames as she confronted a tall young mariner, his dark *béret* jauntily set on one side, who at sight of her recoiled in amazement.

"*Vamezel* Karádek!" he gasped, turning actually gray beneath his tan, I . . . I . . . didn't know, excuse me. . . . I should never . . . never have come!"

Fäik's sole response was a stare and a scowl. Her cheeks glowed with the brightness of one of her own cherished carnations, and she held her underlip viciously between her square little teeth! Truly this was a most difficult little person, pretty as a picture in her boiling wrath, but still excessively disconcerting, and poor Pierrek, awkwardly shifting from one foot to the other, wished himself a hundred yards below the ground. His *coup de tête* in coming to Enez-Pers, whither some irresistible power had been drawing him ever since he had found out from Nédèlék Houarn who Fäik was, seemed monstrous to him now. He had not intended to seek her out at all, but merely to breathe for a short while the same air as herself, and now he had certainly offended her past pardon by this unwarrantable intrusion upon her island!

Fäik made one imperious step towards him. Her violent nature prompted a fierce attack and a torrent of reproaches, but suddenly she stopped, and said, with a curious little contraction of her rosebud lips:

"I don't own this beach! Any one can come here! . . . but we don't like strangers here! It's supposed on Enez-Pers to be good manners to mind one's own business, and not to go round speaking to people one doesn't know!"

This was hard, and the wretched lad winced. "But



## GRAY MIST

. . . when I spoke . . . I didn't know it was you, *Vamezel*!" he stammered, rolling his *béret* like dough between his trembling fingers.

Their eyes met again, and Fäik still further straightened her small figure, though it was already an uncompromisingly erect as *Moéreb-Goz* Tinäik's own!

"Oh, really!" and mademoiselle somehow seemed at a loss for a moment. "Well, will you go now?" she continued, her voice vibrating harshly, but with an emotion which a saner listener would no longer have called angry.

"Oh yes! *Vamezel* Fäik, I am going!" he said, but without moving an inch. He would no more have presumed to disobey her than if she were the Queen of Heaven herself, but he was literally rooted to the spot by an impulse quite uncontrollable, and she, looking haughtily at him, gave him another scowl of intense reproach. She longed to run away, but her strength and usual buoyancy seemed to have taken unaccountable leave of absence, and she also remained anchored to the soft, damp sand.

"Good-bye, then," Pierrek murmured, and Fäik, released from the spell, turned and walked abruptly up the beach, then, quickening her pace, she suddenly sprang lightly over a flat-topped boulder, and he saw her making for the path leading to the lobster fisher's cliff-dwelling at a swift run.

There were hot tears in Pierrek's eyes, and stamping his foot he brushed them roughly away. "Catch me ever coming here again!" he said, furiously.

## CHAPTER VIII

With a stern cincture did the Savage Sea  
Girdle in jealousy the lonely isle;  
Huge crags of syenite and porphyry  
Whereon a mad surge thundered all the while,  
Made but a lowly base on which to pile  
Cliffs heaven-scaling, pinnacled and sheer,  
That with vast eyes of iron seemed to smile  
Sphinx-like, as Time himself were naught to fear,  
And Man a dancing mote, yflowed as soon as here.

Yet mariners who fearfully did fare,  
Saw cottage homes, and hearth-smoke rise, ywis,  
Amid the emerald herbage everywhere  
Fledging the hoar lip of the precipice,  
And orchard-scent, and sweeter e'en than this  
Came on the laden wind, for at one side  
Through thickets of white-thorn and clematis,  
The uplands slanted to the people's pride,  
A little sheltered port, where vessels could abide.

Rude were the folk, gray-eyed, red-haired and tall,  
Hateful of strangers, turbulent and brave,  
Farmers and fishermen, and some withal  
Tore a fierce living from the whelming wave  
Wafting a secret sail—but to enslave  
The heart for aye, it needed but to see  
Their low-voiced maidens, slender, sweet, and grave,  
Fairest of all who in fair Brittany  
Ever wore wide-winged coiffe, or told a rosary.

M. M.

MARI-GWEZEK, holding the door of the presbytery barely ajar, stood with one foot in the crack, glaring at the visitor waiting on the steps outside.

## GRAY MIST

"Is Monsieur le Recteur at home?" Madame Karádek asked, in her most imperious manner.

"Yes," the other admitted, "but he can't be disturbed."

"That's what we shall see," was the unexpected reply, and the door was pushed so suddenly that Mari-Gwezek, routed for the first time in her life, fell back in disorder, leaving free passage to her redoubtable adversary, and stood at bay choking with rage.

"Now announce me!" the unruffled owner of the mill at Kastel-ar-Veur commanded. "And tell Monsieur le Recteur that I am in a hurry."

What might have followed must remain a subject for the wildest conjecture, for at that moment M. Kornog, attracted by the sound of voices, appeared most opportunely on the threshold of his study, whither, to Mari-Gwezek's inexpressible disgust, he at once ushered Madame Karádek.

"I am," the visitor said, by way of introduction, "Tinâik Karádek, Monsieur le Recteur, and I have travelled all the way from Enez-Pers to see if you and I cannot understand each other."

Taken utterly by surprise, the excellent Curé looked at her for a few seconds as though asking himself whether the lady's reason was not slightly unhinged!

"Understand each other?" he echoed in bewilderment, for to his knowledge he had never before set eyes on this curious person.

"That is what I said!" she remarked, emphatically, shaking one thin hand from side to side. "To understand each other." She had quietly seated herself in the Curé's own arm-chair, and was looking him resolutely in the eye.

"Certainly, certainly," he said, soothingly. "But on what point, my dear Madame?"

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"I'm going to tell you that," she condescended. "First, however, may one inquire if you are really the guardian of young Pierrek Rouzik?"

The Curé, who in desperation had taken a chair opposite to her, sat bolt upright. "Yes," he said, glancing curiously into her face, "I am Pierrek Rouzik's guardian, under the will of his father, Yan-Hervé Rouzik, deceased in this village two years ago . . . and," he added with intention, "I am also the boy's stanch friend!"

"No doubt, no doubt! But that will only complicate matters a bit more!" stated Madame Karádek.

The Curé's patience, never of very long duration, was rapidly reaching its limit.

"Sacred name of a—pipe!" he muttered, swinging one foot impatiently up and down. Then, directly to his visitor: "Don't you think you'd better come out with the murder?"

"That's what I would have done long ago if you hadn't kept interrupting," she said, composedly; "I've not come here to amuse myself or you!"

"That," admitted the Curé, "is certainly a fact, as far as I am concerned, at least!"

"Well, then, the sooner you let me talk the better!" she remarked, placidly; "and see here, Monsieur le Recteur, it will be to your advantage to give me your entire attention!"

The priest threw up his hands in angry bewilderment. "That's it," he cried, "talk! It's all I ask of you, and the Saints know that it's a new departure for me to implore a woman to do so! Ordinarily they make my ears sore enough with their eternal clack!"

For the first time something like a smile wrinkled the old woman's thin lips. "You priests don't as a rule give away your chances in that direction either," she put in

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ironically. "But no matter. To come at last to the point, I must tell you if you don't happen to know it already, that your Pierrek Rouzik is in love with my grandniece Fäik, and that . . ."

"Pierrek in love . . . pshaw!" the Curé shouted, half-rising in his seat with excitement; "a lad scarcely eighteen! You don't know what you're saying, Madame Karádek!"

"Sit down, Monsieur le Recteur! There's no use in getting apoplectic about it, because I'm sure of my facts. Pierrek Rouzik has been in love with my grandniece Fäik Karádek ever since he saw her at Oän Gweled's *proella* eight months ago, which is just eight months too long for my taste!"

"And what proofs have you got to offer?" interrupted the refractory listener again.

"Oh! plenty; but that needn't concern you now. What does, however, is that neither my son nor I desire affairs to go any farther. Fäik will be very well provided for, and when we die—which I trust will not be for a long time to come—she'll inherit the farm, the mill, and a few other trifles worthy to be taken into consideration. You will understand, this being so, that we look higher than a penniless lad . . . and a fisherman at that!"

"Penniless . . . not so penniless as all that!" the Curé was betrayed by indignation into exclaiming; "he owns a fine *chaloupe* as good as new . . . a good house, a decentish plot of ground. . . ."

"Turlutu-tu, Monsieur le Recteur," sneered Dame Tinäik, "his mother may marry again and have twenty children . . . don't shrug your shoulders; twenty is perhaps saying too much, but I understand myself. . . . In fine, she's a young woman . . . too young to finish her life alone, anyhow. Moreover, house, *chaloupe*, and de-

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centish plot of ground with the young man thrown in don't tempt us, and that's why I've come to warn you that we'll have nothing to do with it . . . at any price!"

"And who's asking you to?" the Curé retorted, violently. "Not I, you may be sure. What's more, I am persuaded that you have imagined the whole thing! Pierrek is a good boy, shy and silent, and afraid of petticoats. You can't make me believe that he's been running after your grandniece, especially if your grandniece lives on Enez-Pers, twenty miles away! It's all nonsense!"

Dame Tinäik heaved a pitying sigh, and sat back in the hard-seated chair with that composure which little Fäik found so exasperating. "Well, will you kindly explain to me, then," she said, urbanely, but in a voice which caused M. Kornog to grit his strong teeth, "why he manages to visit this out-of-the-way island once a week . . . on Thursdays generally? Regularly on Thursdays, too, my grandniece, I may as well inform you, goes down to the harbor on an errand. Why, according to the private information I have obtained—good and safe information you may take it from me—he loses no occasion to meet her, as, for instance, at the *Pardon* of Romantek, where he danced with her the whole time. Why Fäik herself, never very easy to manage, is now a veritable little faggot of thorns. Can you still assert that I'm inventing?"

The Curé's face, no longer angry, had become suddenly grave. He looked keenly at his strange informant. "I do not believe in these romantic fallings in love at first sight," he argued, to give himself time, and for his pains was interrupted by a derisive laugh closely resembling the triumphant cackle of a hen.

"Much you know about love at first sight or other-

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wise," the old woman said, roughly. "With due respect to your soutane, Monsieur le Recteur, you should be ashamed to speak about such things. But since you won't believe me, I'll just tell you this. Keep your young rooster under lock and key, or one of these days he'll get himself peppered with buckshot. We know how to look after our young girls on Enez-Pers; we're not easy tempered!"

"I should say not!" rejoined her victim, wrathfully, "if one is to judge by what one sees! Rest easy, Madame Karádek, I'll look into this matter, and if there's any truth in it—any truth in it, mind you—I'll put a stop to it. You may take my word for that!"

The crabbed dame rose, upright as a bolt, shook out her ponderous skirts, smoothed down the basques of her richly-embroidered velvet-bordered corsage, patted the snowy wings of her lace coiffe with a familiar little movement, and dropped her host a little courtesy—all of a piece, like a mechanical doll.

"That's all I wanted to obtain!" she remarked, with undiminished calm, and with a patronizing little nod went towards the door. "All I wanted to—insure!" she said, over her shoulder, and was gone.

M. Kornog watched her disappear with eyes starting almost out of their sockets. His face was very red, and his strong hands trembled just the least little bit as they lay on the arms of his chair. "The old petticoated devil!" he said, aloud, "I wonder if what she said is true . . . if so," he concluded, sadly, "poor little Lanäik hasn't wept all her tears yet!"

For a full quarter-hour he sat handkerchief in hand, mopping his brow with the regularity of a clock, and in the intervals staring at a shaft of dancing sunlight that pencilled zigzags of shadow upon the polished floor.

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Never had he been so puzzled to find a way out of a difficulty! Who could advise him in this sore dilemma—and then suddenly an inspiration made him call in stentorian tones that rang throughout the house: “Mari-Gwezek, come here at once. I want you!”

The Curé’s domestic tyrant appeared so suddenly, that doubts of her having been all the time in close proximity to the door would have amounted to an insult!

“Well,” she said, entering with a face almost as engaging as a prison grating.

The Curé saw that nothing but a straight blow would answer, and in accents which like his summons just now were entirely different from his usual mode of addressing his Gorgon, said, curtly:

“Now what do you think of what you just heard that woman say?”

Mari-Gwezek’s superb assurance collapsed like a pricked bubble . . . nay, she even had the grace to blush, a thing which of a certainty had not happened for fifty years. She was a clever woman, however, who never lied uselessly, nor excused herself when she could help it, and with instantly-recovered spirit she in her turn rounded upon her master.

“There’s no one but you, Monsieur Alanik”—she had been the nurse of his childhood, and in moments of great excitement sometimes reverted to the old mode of address—“Yes, no one but you, who would have let that impertinent hag go on as she did! But, then, what she said is true enough!”

“How do you know?” the Curé asked, thunderstruck.

“How do I know? Why, you poor lamb of God, everybody knows it here excepting you, and that silly ninny of a Lanäik!”



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She took up a fine, picturesque attitude, with her left hand at her flat waist, and scanned him pityingly.

"What is to be done, Mari-Gwezek?" the priest asked, at last, for, like Molière, he was not above invoking at times his old servant's shrewd common-sense. "I don't think anybody can stop Pierrek if he is really as deeply in love as she said. They'll kill him some day, you'll see. They're awful savages on Enez-Pers!"

"The Holy Saints forbid!" she piously exclaimed. "No, no! Monsieur le Recteur. They're not so bad. *Fraudeurs*,<sup>1</sup> of course, but not assassins."

The Curé shook his head. He knew that this beautiful azure island was peopled by the descendants of a turbulent and violent race. They were to-day, as of yore, long-limbed, slow-moving men; broad-shouldered, brown-faced, and red of hair, with harsh and commanding gray eyes that boded no good to their enemies. Could stones but talk—and on Enez-Pers everything naturally was stone, clean, enduring, and unimpressionable like its inhabitants—what a grim chorus would have arisen, recording deeds of incredible valor as well as of deep horror done in cold blood, for if life is conducted in a less hurried fashion there than anywhere else in Brittany—where slowness of movement and of speech is the rule—this taciturnity does not exclude a frequent inclination to extraordinary violence!

M. Kornog, looking absently at his housekeeper, turned all this over in his mind, and sighed. He was a man essentially conscientious, and the trust placed in his capable hands by Hervé Rouzik seemed no light thing to him.

"Now, don't you go fretting yourself, Monsieur le Recteur!" Mari-Gwezek said, abruptly. "I would send for

<sup>1</sup> Smugglers.

Pierrek if I were you, catechise him soundly, and then tell him that he is supposed to be in love with the lass's money . . . that'll prick his pride, or else my name ain't Mari-Gwezek."

M. Kornog rose to his feet. "Sacred name of thunder!" he cried, "you are a clever woman, and I'm glad I consulted you . . . and to think," he concluded, naively, "that I would never have thought of that . . . I who should know the human mind at least as well as you do! But, then, I never was much of a diplomat!"

"A what?" the old woman asked with a frown. "But never mind, whatever it is I'm sure it isn't polite, so you needn't repeat it! When you get angry and swear like a trooper—a thing that's disgraceful, Monsieur le Recteur, for a Curé to do—I'm always sure to be called names. I know I'm of no consequence to you, not the slightest!" and she finished her tirade with an expressive gesture strikingly describing the movement of chaff blown before the wind.

At this point the Curé's sense of humor became too much for him. "Ah! but you are amusing—enormously amusing," he said, leaning back against his desk to laugh more easily. "One never knows with you where tragedy and comedy link together."

"Oh, you needn't roar like that! I'm here to amuse you, that's all I'm good for! Still you are getting very bad manners, Monsieur le Recteur, when you make fun of a woman old enough to be your mother, with a good bit left over!"

"My good Mari-Gwezek," M. Kornog said, repentantly, the mirth wiped away from his kindly face as with a cloth, "you know very well I meant no harm! You're the best and the most difficult proposition ever created; but there! there!" he concluded, patting her bony shoulder; "say that you forgive me!"

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"Leave me in peace, Monsieur le Recteur. . . . You are nothing but a cajoler anyway, and it's a good thing you're a Curé after all, or else women would have stood no chance with you! Go along now, put on your hat, and meet that rascal Pierrek at the harbor; the boats must be coming in now, and that will give you your chance."

\* \* \* \* \*  
\* \* \* \* \*

The dull pinkish light of the North, seemingly almost a thing of vaporous substance, like fog or mist, floated widely upon the colorless sea. Since two days the huge wan disk that does duty for a sun out there, and sometimes humbugs you into the belief that it really lives, had seen fit—in shame, perhaps—to hide its pallid face, and as the breeze had fallen completely away, it was a dead world indeed in the midst of which the fishing-fleet from far-off Brittany rocked wearily on the hardly perceptible undulations of a glassy flood-tide. There must have been at least sixty of them, all courtesying solemnly to one another, when each seventh heave of the deep ocean breath shouldered them to the ends of their respective cables. Around them all was silence—not an ordinary sea-silence, but the circum-polar variety, which is a cessation of all sound, pure and simple. It grips one at the heart, this silence, makes one loath to speak above a whisper, and weighs upon the strongest nerves, as though the purlieus of Iceland marched upon that Kingdom of Death whereof the old Norse legends tell—lifeless regions forgotten by God upon the surface of His sea.

Astride the bowsprit of the schooner *Sant Kaour*,<sup>1</sup> from Kermarioker, Pierrek stared forward with unseeing eyes,

<sup>1</sup> Saint Corentin.

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for he was in the midst of a problem that absorbed more of his attention than the peculiarities of these new latitudes or even the monotonous chant of the men pulling cod out of the soundless water a few yards away from him.

“Amour, bonheur, toute ma vie  
Prends tout. . . . Mais en retour je veux  
Pour moi seul ta voix si jolie,  
Ta douce haleine et tes yeux bleus  
Amour, bonheur, toute ma vie,  
Tout est à toi si tu le veux!”

The soft cadence of the last lines fell without any sonority whatsoever—sonority is absent from the Icelandic atmosphere—but strangely enough they partly aroused Pierrek:

“Amour, bonheur, toute ma vie,  
Tout est à toi si tu le veux!”

The words were French, but Pierrek had learned French from M. Kornog, and the wide-stretched wings of his problem folded themselves at their bidding around one word that encompassed all for him—“Fäik!”

His remembrance of the past months was almost photographic in the clearness and extreme definition of its lights and shadows, and with painful precision he was seeing unrolled before him the bristle of rocks defending the Azure Island of his dream, the gray wall of Tad Karádek's little domain, harshly profiled far up against the afternoon sky, and Fäik herself poised like a sea-swallow on the very edge of the *falaise*, waving him an *au revoir* full of promise and despair. The disclosure to Pierrek of the sordid interpretation placed upon his love had, as shrewd Mari-Gwezek prophesied, been the knell of all his present hopes, but not of his obstinate courage,

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which braced itself for a long struggle with the terrible grandaunt and her obedient son. Yield, Pierrek never would; it was not in his nature to do so, especially as long as he knew that Fäik loved him. Of this she had given him proof, for she had declared that were she to remain forever unwedded, no other lad than Pierrek should call her wife, and, utterly indifferent to her grandaunt's beratings, had plighted her troth to him—by proxy, since they could no longer meet, Nédèlék Houarn being the messenger.

"Tell him," Fäik had said, "that I will be his!" and Pierrek knew that she meant it.

Other worries had overtaken the little home of the Rouziks. The sardines had not befriended Kermarioker; the herrings, too, had almost failed, and after a hard winter the young *chef de famille* had at last won his point and joined the Icelandic fishing-fleet.

Was he content then? Who could have told? True to his blood he uttered no complaint, said no word of regret, even at the hour of parting from all he loved on earth. When, however, he found himself face to face with the emptiness of the Icelandic seas, a change, if a silent one, came over him, caused perhaps more by that enervating eternal polar daylight than by the hardships and fatigues of the dreary campaign. The others on board the *Sant Kaour* had gone through it all before, but he was new at the trade, and felt it more than they did. Happily he was strong among the strongest, and when after twelve consecutive hours of hauling and pulling at his line he felt every inch of his body ache with fatigue, he could sleep the twenty-fathom slumber of the Ice-lander, and be ready for more work on awakening. Raw and bleeding knuckles, painful gurry sores, privations of many sorts, it would have been all one to him,

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could he only have known what was happening to Fäik and his own poor little mother, alone now in Kermarioker. That was the pain not to be stilled by any amount of dreaming, any tenacity of hope. And hour followed hour in paralyzing monotony, varied only here and there at long intervals by appalling storms that scattered the oppressive silence to all four corners of heaven, and served to brace the minds and bodies of the Bretons—it sounded so much like home to them!

At last, one inexpressibly dull day in the middle of June, a day of what they call there "a white calm," because nothing moves or seems so much as to breathe, and both sea and sky are muffled in layer over layer of snowy gauze, through which, however, one can see with singular clearness, the crew of the *Sant Kaour* sighted a slender plume of smoke, but slightly darker than the surrounding haze, growing more and more defined with every passing minute.

"The government cruiser coming on its rounds!" was shouted from one end of the deck to the other in glee unspeakable, for those insignificant volutes, but vaguely staining as yet the pallor of the sky, heralded the coming of news from Brittany, of the individual letters so eagerly expected, and finally of those few shreds of home atmosphere which the cruiser seemed to draw after it across those cold, oily waters.

Soon the black hull of the official visitor gleamed above the nearer ocean folds, and like homing pigeons all the schooners in sight made for this slender morsel of the distant native land. Then what a lowering of boats and racing for the gangway, Pierrek among the foremost, pulling an oar that bent like a withe against the backward sweep of the reluctant water! And a little later as he stood upon a dazzling deck and watched the official hand

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groping for him in the depths of a long canvas-sack, how his heart did jump into his throat!

Three letters fell to his share, and recognizing his mother's writing, with shaking fingers he broke the clumsily-fastened black wafer of the envelope—neglecting, hardly seeing, the other two in the joy of the moment!

"MY SON" (wrote Lanäik, in her best and most careful hand), "I am as well as can be in your absence, and hope that the present will find you likewise. I have the pleasure to tell you here that our poor Monsieur Recteur has sprained his left foot jumping over a wall to kill an enraged dog that was going to devour your little cousin Vira Gweled; also that the measles are raging here since a month, several little ones having died of it; the weather is good and there are quite a good many sardines, Nédèlék Houarn brought eight thousand with the *Stérédén* yesterday. I languish to think that you are not here to command the boat and earn your share instead of him. That is all I have to announce for the moment, excepting that a sail-maker from Enez-Pers brought the news of old Tinäik Karádek's sudden death, she having fallen from the loft where she was watching the men store the hay, and unhooked her heart<sup>1</sup> in the fall. So this is all for the present, and

"I am for life and eternity

"Your loving mother

"WIDOW ROUZIK."

"Mari-Gwezek and myself, with six others, are making a novena at the Chapel of Notre Dame de *Béaj-Vad*<sup>2</sup> for your speedy return, my son, in good health of soul and body."

Pierrek read the letter through to the end, then with this message of reawakened hope in his hand stood for a moment absolutely still, the color coming and going in his face with every beat of his heart. Old Tinäik dead . . . that meant the path that led to Fäik cleared of its greatest obstacle — perhaps of its only one, for Tad Karádek, no longer upheld by his mother, would doubt-

<sup>1</sup> Literal translation of the Breton expression.

<sup>2</sup> Bon voyage.

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less give way, and suddenly a flood of mad joy rushed through the lad, healing all his wounds!

Forgotten were the days and nights of toil; forgotten the enervating, dead, rose-tinted nights and mournful, white-shrouded days of the Icelandic seas; forgotten also the everlasting procession of goggle-eyed cods gasping and writhing on the slimy deck, the back-breaking labor, the hundreds of miles of weary sailing to reach home again—all was forgotten at one stroke! And when at last he remembered the other two letters which he had barely glanced at, more happiness was in store for him, since one proved to be from his beloved patron, M. Kornog—the other from Fäik!



## CHAPTER IX

Then as the swift wheels of departing day  
Clouded the ocean-rim with dust of gold,  
Sail after crimson sail from far away  
Upon that lucent brightness wide unrolled,  
Came flying, and the sea-wind fresh and cold  
Bore sounds across the waters wondrous clear,  
Outcries and jests, the catch a seaman trolled,  
And sailor laughter that was good to hear  
For one who watched and waited on the harbor pier.  
M. M.

AT six o'clock of a glorious autumn afternoon—it was the Nativity of the Blessed Virgin—a group of people stood massed upon the jetty of Kermarioker, looking excitedly seaward. The view was particularly beautiful at this hour and in such golden weather, for with the slowly declining sun the cliffs were gradually becoming enmeshed in a web of ruddy light cast delicately over clefts of deepening shadow, dark and soft like the glowing heart of a Russian amethyst. High in the zenith floated a few delicately flushed wisps of cloud, and the ocean itself, seen between the two great peaky headlands like a broad stretch of finely shirred satin, rippled with reflected brightness.

Moment by moment the delicacy of tint grew greater, the precision of outline clearer, as shine and shade forsook their sharper extremes in order to blend the more harmoniously, until to the watching eye distance and substance were both lost in a cloudlike vision of floating

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color. Suddenly from behind the farthest of the two giants five or six quickly-advancing Iceland schooners, all heading towards the quay, all running in under full press of sail before a breeze that laughed its way gayly from the distant lilac of the horizon, flung greeting to the land in a flood of melody. From all those young throats the Hymn of St. Hervé of Kermarioker was wafted shoreward, *Le Chant du Retour*, as they call it there, and rhythmically the slender black hulls, a little faded and stained by travel, seemed to swing on, the tall, tapering masts to nod in salutation as they approached, caressed by the rosy luminance of sky and sea.

There on the little granite quay they knew how eagerly they were expected by mothers and wives and fiancées, by dear friends old and young, all waiting to give them welcome, and they sang with all their might, as though to add the strength of their vigorous lungs to that of the swift sea-breath, humming all too faintly for their impatience in the rigging above their bared heads. They brought back, each and every one, his secret record of personal valor, of self-sacrifice, cheerful endurance, and unfailing industry, with here and there a sin or two that Monsieur le Recteur would wipe out to-morrow and bury in absolution, the brightness of his comprehension and leniency reflecting a long afterglow which would endure even through the wild carousals following the return.

Leading the procession of graceful vessels, each with a heavy mass of shadow beneath her forefoot, a wake of quivering gold behind, came the *Sant Kaour*, a man at the tiller to whom every rock, every ripple of this dangerous Bay of Kermario was as familiar as the inside of his pockets, guiding her firmly and unhesitatingly close around the wicked reefs that thrust their black muzzles just a few inches above high-water mark; the elegant

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bows gliding onward with scarcely a sound, the big anchor already swinging in readiness over-side.

Slowly the head-boat edged nearer and nearer to the stout granite mole, her sails sliding down as if by magic to the accompaniment of clear-voiced orders and a cheerful noise of blocks and tackles. A ringing shout went up from the jostling crowd, and Pierrek, unable to restrain his impatience any longer, clearing at one bound the narrow interval between deck and jetty, found himself in his mother's arms.

The corn-flower blue eyes of the young widow had acquired an intensified depth of color and expression, it seemed to him, when he at last looked at her, owing, it might be, to the eternal straining seaward for the first glimpse of the beloved child's return. Her sweet, narrow face too was drawn, and fine lines of anxiety had graven themselves deeply enough there never to be quite effaced again. Pierrek was no longer so cloudlessly delighted. And she? Again and again she gazed at the superbly tall, broad-shouldered form of her son, her sole protector and main-stay now, and saw that he was going to be a man after her own hungry heart. Holding each other by the little finger in the time-honored Breton way—*par le petit doigt*—they wandered up the village road, deserted just now, for all the people had remained clustered near the anchoring boats. Evening was falling, and in the cool tang of the breeze a hint of slowly shortening days was to be felt. In the ditches, too, hundreds of sad-faced, almost black scabiosæ—those typical flowers of autumn that we call *Veuves*<sup>1</sup> in Brittany—nodded sleepily upon their tremulous, threadlike stems. The only sounds were the buzzing twang of swift cockchafers

<sup>1</sup> Widows.

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cutting the salt-impregnated air, in haste to reach home, no doubt, before darkness overtook them, and far away on the slope, crowned by M. Kornog's presbytery, the melancholy *hou—hou—hou—hou* of a barn-owl, calling to the moon to hurry up, and be quick about it.

*"Pe pa ve ar bleun er balann,  
Pe pa ve ar bleun el lann,  
A garez muia da Vamm ?"¹*

A very old woman, sitting within the door of a tiny house, was singing as she rocked her last-born great-grandchild on her knees. Mother and son smiled as they passed and looked at each other from the corner of the eye before turning into their own lane, at the end of which Lanäik's garden, in all its late-summer glory, was wafting towards them the most exquisite of fragrant welcomes.

How different was this happy day from the gray April morning when he had said good-bye to his home nearly six months ago! He still seemed to hear the drip-drip of a fine, powdery rain gliding along the thatch, as he and Lanäik shut and locked the door before wending their heavy-hearted way to the harbor. There, too, nothing but tears had greeted them, human tears and rain tears commingling in one great desolation. Old grandmothers, already touched by the finger of death, bidding mayhap an eternal good-bye to proud sailor grandsons standing erect and a little shyly close to them. Black-clad widowed mothers like his own clinging in a last and desperate embrace to their Benjamins, lovers shame-

¹ Is it when the broom is in bloom  
Or when it is the furze,  
That best you love your mother?

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facedly murmuring a tender vow, a whispered *kenávo*<sup>1</sup> in some secluded corner of the wharf, and lastly a handful of recalcitrant laggards who were being lugged to their boats bound hand and foot and uttering hoarse curses and imprecations, to be finally thrown with scant ceremony *à fond de Cale*—in the hold—until they recovered their temporarily submerged reason and their fidelity to signed engagements. Two by two the tall-masted schooners had been warped out into the bay, and for a long time he had watched the slight figure of his mother hurrying along the coast path to the top of Cape Kermario, from whence she could see the last of this cruel *Sant Kaour* that was robbing her of her boy.

The Holy Saints be praised, all this was past now, perhaps never to return!—and those two reunited beings who so dearly loved each other remained for a few moments before entering their little home on the extreme end of the point upon which it stood, inhaling the ineffably pure air that brushed across the flowering gorse, and listening to the caressing hum of the tiny wavelets—baby waves, innocent and merry—playing amid the grim rocks that chequered the lower beach, as though they never again could swell mountain high in those blind furies that destroy and murder wantonly.

\* \* \* \* \*

Next morning the warm September sun, true to the promises of his dazzling exit of the preceding evening, fell like finely-sifted gold upon a level and shining sea. A wisp of mist still hung here and there beneath the myrtles and laurels of Fäik's flowery domain—just enough of it to veil and protect the tenderer fronds of many a

<sup>1</sup> *Au revoir.*

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lacelike fern. Birds flitted and chuckled upon the grass, and heavy with fluffy masses of almond-scented stars the far-spreading clematis above the porch seemed to have rounded itself into a huge bridal garland scintillating with countless liquid gems.

Erect, trim, and graceful, Fäik herself was just leaving the dairy over which she now ruled alone, when Tad Karádek came quietly towards her down the little grassy path leading from the mill. He was quite close to her before she heard his slow step, and she turned sharply with a little start.

"I thought you had gone down to the village!" she said. He looked at her a moment without speaking, for at sight of her happy face the sermon he had prepared in his mind had suddenly vanished, leaving only a blank, utter and disconcerting, in its stead. And this was the *Conan*<sup>1</sup> of the Karádeks, a *c'hlan*<sup>2</sup> famed far and wide for the rigidity with which it was commanded! How humiliating for the old man to realize that he who was dreaded and revered by a whole country-side, whom many families looked upon as their head and sole counsellor, was thus thrown off his balance by the smile of a little girl, not—as he himself expressed it—heavier than two sous' worth of butter! But he was quick to recover himself.

"So," he said at last, with a momentary twinkle in his grave eyes, "you are singing this morning?" While awaiting her coming he had from behind the neighboring hedge heard the first bars of a love-song trilling out of the wide-open dairy windows, and he could not withstand the temptation to bring that pretty, faint blush of hers

<sup>1</sup> Chief.

<sup>2</sup> Clan. The Bretons have a clan system similar though not exactly corresponding to that of the Scottish Celts.

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to the surface! She turned away and looked through a screen of tall ribbon-reeds towards her garden, a little vexed, perhaps, but ready to laugh, too, on the slightest provocation—for was not this September, the month that was to bring her already belated lover home? Beneath her uncle's mocking gaze she was, however, becoming amusingly less, her small brown hands fidgeting with a long grass plume which she had bent towards her, and the soft color fluctuating in her rounded cheeks. She was a brave little girl who for over a year had played a singularly dangerous game with unwearied obstinacy, for, as M. Kornog had once very truthfully told his irascible housekeeper, the men of Enez-Pers did not joke where their womankind were concerned.

"Come," Tad Karádek said, vainly seeking for his carefully-garnered but sadly-truant severity, "let us sit down quietly together on this bench," and he led the way to a moss-grown stone settle of great antiquity that had stood for many years immediately within the curious alcove formed by a vine-clad break in the wall that doubtless took the place of some collapsed embrasure. Before them, in a framework of exquisite autumnal foliage, lay a broad panorama of extravagantly-tinted rocks and gleaming sea. Far away, cincturing the hazy main-land, crag after crag of rugged cliff melted into a distance where the two great peaks of Kermario stood out majestically against the sky, and Fäik gazed for a moment lovingly at them, shimmering all pink and cloudlike in the soft morning light.

Tad Karádek was carefully pressing down the tobacco in his little clay pipe—*brule-gueule* we call them there, inelegantly but graphically—and seemed in no particular hurry to open the conversation he had himself sought.

"You are on the eve, Fäik," he said, after a long pause,

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"of committing a great folly." He jerked his thumb over his left shoulder in the direction of Kermarioker, and continued: "You have given your heart to a lad who, although there's nothing serious to say against him, is not of your people, who is too young to make a good husband, and who has no money."

Fäik heard, gazing listlessly across the bay with dreamy eyes, as though it was scarcely worth while to assert once more her unshakable resolution, and, after one glance at her baffling little face, her uncle paused again, lighted his pipe with a spluttering sulphur-match, and slowly resumed:

"You do not believe what I say, my girl, because I am old and you are young. It is natural that you should think I don't know what I'm talking about, but there you are wrong, for I do know. What will be the result of a marriage between you and Pierrek Rouzik? Will you go and live in his house as a poor fisherman's wife, you who have lorded it here over half a dozen men and maids always ready to do your bidding, or will you ask him to give up his *métier* and . . . his mother . . . to come and share your home? They are proud, those Rouziks, and I doubt if he would accept that. I am old, Fäik, and you are my only affection on earth. Do you really and truly want to forsake me for a *gars* with whom you have not spoken a dozen times in your life?" There was an odd break in the miller's voice, and Fäik's eyes suddenly filled with tears.

"Oh! Uncle Gwion!" she pleaded, turning quickly towards him. "Don't speak like that! I can't bear it. You know that I love you dearly, and that it would break my heart to leave you, but . . ." She stopped as abruptly as she had begun and hid her face in her hands.

"Yes—but! There's always something like that to



destroy the hopes of old people," Tad Karádek rejoined, sadly. "I, for instance, had hoped that you would marry your cousin Klaoda,<sup>1</sup> a proper man that one, well established on Enez-Pers, with money in the *bahut*, and a good farm to bring his wife to."

Fäik looked up and shook her contemptuous little head. "I would never, never marry Klaoda! He drinks!" she said, curtly.

The old man shrugged his shoulders. "Drinks? Yes, a little perhaps. We all drink more or less in Brittany."

"Not Pierrek!" she interrupted, indignantly.

"Not yet," the miller remarked, cynically enough, "but wait until you see him after a heavy catch, or returning from a *Pardon*. He has got a pair of eyes that seem to me pretty merciless—they harden too quickly—and when I spoke to him the day he sneaked over here to bid you good-bye . . ."

"You ordered him off the island! Oh! Uncle Gwion, how could you!" And her own changeable eyes gave him a steel-like flash more cutting than any dark orbs might have achieved.

The miller shuffled uneasily on the mossy bench. "Your grandaunt wished it!" he said, deprecatingly. "Besides, he had no business here."

"Yes he had," she retorted, peremptorily, "since . . . since I love him!" The words were bravely, almost defiantly, said. This girl would decidedly remain impossible to bend.

"Listen to me, Fäik!" Tad Karádek said, with a sudden touch of her own imperious air. "This is not the first time that I have argued all this with you—but it will be the last, that I swear. I am talking for the sake

<sup>1</sup> Claude.

of your dead parents—God rest their souls” (he crossed himself devoutly)—“especially for your dear mother, who went to join the angels confiding you to my care with her last breath. She was a woman of many sorrows, for she lost four children and her man before she was thirty, and one thing she feared above all others was that you should marry a man who followed the sea—you, her pet lamb, the last of all!” He cleared his throat and looked angrily at the pulsing ocean, so lovely and harmless of aspect this peerless September morning. Fäik had drawn close to him, and here a timid little brown hand was hesitatingly laid on his knee.

“But, Uncle, what am I to do . . . when I . . . love him?” she asked, tremulously.

“To be sure! To be sure!” he said, regretfully. “You love him, and when a Bretonne does that it’s for life! But your mother, too, loved a fisher-lad, and her heart broke with anxiety and sorrow. She married against our wishes, although he at least was a Karádek like ourselves—not that consent was refused at the last, for that is not a thing she would have risked, but she waited eight years for him, and when her parents, wearied out, yielded, they warned her she would have no luck. My mother, her father’s sister, prophesied it all . . . ah! yes, prophesied it all!”

He shook his head forebodingly, and Fäik shivered, for her great-aunt’s prophecies had mostly had a dreadful knack of coming true, and she herself had had a taste of them.

“Remember, Fäik, that I”—he tapped himself on the chest with the stem of his pipe—“will not fight against you and him any longer. When my mother lived I did so because she made me, but life is too short for such struggles; nor will I let anxiety spoil my appetite for fear

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of the troubles that must come to us from all this!" He looked round the horizon with an Islander's far-seeing gaze. "And trouble will come: I feel it and know it!" he concluded, solemnly, impressively.

"Uncle Gwion!" gasped Fäik, in real terror. "Uncle Gwion!"

"When children go counter to the desires of their elders there is always trouble—always!" the old man muttered. "But let him beware, if you take him, for whether he stays with you here, or you with him there beyond, if he should make you shed one tear—if he dares ever to bring unhappiness upon you—I will kill him—yes" (the miller rose to his feet), "kill him like a dog and be glad of the job, and curse him dead, so that no salvation ever comes to him here or hereafter!"

Fäik, scared for once to the core of her soul, had raised a white, imploring face to his, watching him with great, wretched eyes, but as the last words fell from his thin, grim lips, she started up like one electrified, and stood before him, breathing fast. Her whole passionate little being was quivering with fury, and she drew herself up superbly.

"Don't say any more, Uncle Gwion!" she cried, with withering scorn. "You can't hurt him by your threats, and it's cowardly to threaten an absent man!" Her clear young voice rang out boldly, like a silver flute: "I love him! I love him, I tell you! and he—ah! God, he loves me! Not my money, as great-aunt once told me!" The brilliant rays of the morning sun flashed strongly on her lovely flushed face and slender, black-robed figure, where she swayed excitedly, the silken embroideries of her corsage sparkling in little spurts of flame, her white coiffe fluttering like wings. Tad Karádek stared at her in amazement, and felt singularly ill at ease.

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"And don't let any one of the clan play him any tricks!" she continued. "You are the Chief. You will be obeyed if you bid them let him alone. I would rather die—yes, die of shame—than put him on his guard against my own people, and if I did—I know him—he'd come all the quicker. That's the kind of *gars* he is! I didn't mean to talk like this to you, Uncle Gwion, but you would make a blessed Saint lose patience here on Enez-Pers, with all your talk about nobody being worthy of us, as if that were true. Anyhow, I'll not marry him against your will, as you very well know; not now, since I could not, nor later when the law gives me the right, but if you or any other does him a hurt by word or deed, I'll jump off the *falaise* onto the rocks! That's all I have to say!"

She stopped, struggling painfully for breath, shuddering palpably, and then all of a sudden broke into wild, long-drawn sobs that shook her from head to foot.

For two or three minutes the miller watched her mutely; then he bent forward, and, putting his arm around her, drew her firmly towards him.

"Hush, my little daughter, hush!" he murmured, holding her tightly clasped. "Forgive your old uncle for trying to make you happy in his own way! And don't be afraid, the Rouziks always could take care of themselves—besides which—well, we of Enez-Pers are not as heathenish and savage as you think!" He laughed bitterly. "A love like yours makes him sacred, Fäik Karádek, for nobody will dare to touch *Conan* Karádek's nephew!"

## CHAPTER X

My love abideth where the waves bear up the bending skies,  
My love upon her island-cliffs looks down with straining eyes  
Where shrunk and small the breakers crawl, and driving stoutly  
through,  
My red sail skirts the boiling surge that hideth Ar-Men-Du.

My love is whiter than the foam that flasheth on the brine,  
My love is sweeter than the breath blown from the roaring pine,  
Sweet as the lilies of Ker-Ys that flower 'neath the sea,  
O St. Hervé, speed on the day that weds my love and me!

Her heart is deeper than the plunge beneath the sheer falaise,  
Her eyes are darker than the shades that wrinkle at its base,  
She's lissome as the gray gull's wing, she's brighter than the  
spray,  
O St. Kaour—O swift and sure speed on my wedding-day!  
M. M.

THE beautiful October morning—the morning of his wedding-day—had but just dawned amid a soft chatoyancy of color that seemed to cast a hush of wonder over the awakening world, when Pierrek opened the door of his mother's house.

There had been rain the night before, and all the atmosphere was fragrant with an energetic mixture of oozing resin and crushed ferns—a smell peculiar to the pine-clad slopes of the valley of Kermario—and deeply did Pierrek breathe it in as he turned into that narrow cañon between the shoreward ridges of the peaks on his way to the presbytery.

In a few minutes he was running by a little-used

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track, shorter than the regular path, up slopes where furze and whin bloomed amicably side by side in golden luxuriance, slanting gradually away into a hazy, mist-veiled distance, unbroken, save by a group of pines here and there, or some straight-stemmed young oak clad in the brilliant livery of autumn. Far overhead the larks sent down faint sprinklings of melody, while amid the tangle of verdure creeping beneath the boughs of the woods that he entered presently, wrens and goldfinches, robin redbreasts and *chardonnerets* added their delicate notes to the low-voiced orchestra of Silence.

Pierrek hurried on with long, swinging strides, his heart singing within his breast loudest of all, and, jumping à *pieds joints* over the last stile, found himself at the side gate of the Recteur's garden. Instantly the scents of a thousand old-fashioned flowers greeted him, and he paused instinctively to enjoy this new feast before pushing open the nasturtium-garlanded lattice. Only a few yards away, breviary in hand, was the Curé. Silently Pierrek stood beneath the shade of a veteran laurel and watched his patron as he moved slowly along, his eyes on the book he held, his lips moving as he read. He had not heard the lad's footsteps upon the mossy border of the path, but suddenly becoming aware that there was some one near, he raised his eyes and smiled.

"So you have come to fetch me, *Moussaillon?*" he said, unconsciously using the fond old appellation, and pocketing his rusty breviary. "I am ready—never so ready as to-day!"

A slender ribbon of pink copper had begun to outline the still sombre ridges of the frowning cliffs—those cliffs of Kermario that seem so fitly to embody the undying and tenacious Faiths of Armór—and just as he spoke the sun suddenly cleared the top of the farthest and tallest

peak, constellating the whole table-land with myriads of glittering gems.

"Weather fit for a wedding-day!" the priest continued, joyfully scanning the marvellous horizon, and consulting with a sailor's eye those transparent shadows of green sapphire—generally betokening a prolonged calm—that swayed to and fro at the foot of the cliffs with every undulation of the deep-breathing ground-swell.

Curiously enough, at the point where they now stood, on the very edge of the cliff terrace that gave standing-room to church and presbytery, the smell of pine and fern so predominant in the valley at their feet—nay, even the breath of the garden—was being swiftly thrust aside by a wonderful fragrance, so penetrating, so rare and unusual, that they looked questioningly at each other.

"Ah!" Pierrek said, quickly, pointing downward, "that comes from the crests of the little waves when they break down there. It's from the drowned gardens of Ker-Ys<sup>1</sup>—why, yes, to-day is St. Grallon's fête, is it not, Monsieur le Recteur? It's only right that the old city under the sea should celebrate."

"Oh, Pierrek!" M. Kornog remonstrated. "Are you to remain always the same incorrigible dreamer? What can gardens that were sunk a thousand years ago have to do with this?"

"Everything, Monsieur le Recteur—everything! You don't believe? What of the pest ship, then, that you scolded me about on this very same path three years ago?"

<sup>1</sup> Lately some exquisite fragments of mosaic pavement, coated over with a strangely hard transparent lacquer, that have been raised by fishermen from the sea, would seem to indicate that the legendary city of Ker-Ys had an actual existence. It is said to have been swallowed up by the waves at the bidding of St. Gwenolé on account of the wickedness of the beautiful Ahès, who afterwards became Queen of the Sirens.

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What about the *pressigne*<sup>1</sup> we saw together—the little blue fire-ball—on the night of my revered father's death—peace be to his soul?"

The Recteur slackened his pace a little—they were skirting the cemetery wall now—and before answering he cast a swift glance at the rough granite cross that marked Hervé's last resting-place. Carefully and lovingly was the little plot tended, and a profusion of asters, both mauve and white, raised their dew-spangled heads amid a deep border of ivy on the narrow mound. It was not far from the low wall, and as they slowly walked past both men reverently removed their hats.

"Yes," M. Kornog said, meditatively, "it was a strange and wonderful sight—but still, my boy, it did not smack of the irreligious, whereas those legends of Ker-Ys—"

For a moment PierreK pondered. "All the same, Monsieur le Recteur, whether you believe me or not, I myself have seen on moonlight nights the face of Ahès<sup>2</sup> looking up at me from the rock-pool of the Needles of Treguillec with her fiery green eyes. I've heard her voice foretelling storms at moonrise, and I've seen her—I've seen her herself, Monsieur le Recteur—floating by, her long, red-gold hair—the very color of mine, by-the-way," he interrupted himself to say with an embarrassed little laugh—"trailing behind her from beneath a great crown of shining green stones! It's she who lures us sailors to our death with her witch's song:

*"Ahès, breman-Mary-Morgan  
E skend an oabr, d'an noz, a gan I!"*<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Premonition.

<sup>2</sup> Ahès is also known by the name of Dahut, as the King of Ker-Ys, her father, is in certain provinces of Brittany designated by that of Grallon.

<sup>3</sup> Forever does Ahès the siren sing to the glow of the firmament.



"Why, Nédélék Houarn, Monsieur le Recteur, has watched King Grallon galloping like mad on his ghost horse along the beach—he can't rest, poor soul, since St. Gwenolé made him cast his wicked daughter into the whirlpool of Ker-Ys. Besides, there are some who say—"

But here the Curé sternly interfered.

"I don't care to hear you speak like that, Pierrek—no, not in the least, especially on a day like to-day! Let Ahès and King Grallon and poor St. Gwenolé alone. What you should think of is this unexpected happiness of yours, and how to make your little wife happy. Fancy you as a husband!" And all severity disappearing from his face at the thought, he laughed heartily.

Pierrek, a little abashed, was looking at him with eyes suddenly soft and deep and dark. "One will do one's best, Monsieur le Recteur!" he murmured, shamefacedly.

"I hope so!" the Curé said, gravely, pausing a second, for they were now within a stone's-throw of Lanäik's garden-wall. "But remember, Pierrek, no drinking! You have been reasonable until now, it is true; nevertheless, drink is the curse of our land. You are only nineteen, and have not been tempted—as yet, but I want to be sure that you will not later go the way of all the rest."

"But certainly, Monsieur le Recteur! My father did not drink—hard, that is, nor my uncle Oän-Gweled. Why should I?"

"Your father was an exceptional man in every respect—a rare type of the long ago—but other men of your family drink like swine, as you well know, and I don't want you ever to be like them."

At the door of the cottage stood Lanäik, for the first time since Hervé's death clad in fête clothes—her own wedding-habit of fine, dark-blue cloth bordered and

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banded with velvet. The tight-fitting *justin*,<sup>1</sup> gleaming with multi-colored silk embroideries and silver paillettes, was finished off on the shoulders and around the neck by one of those daintily-fluted ruffs of rare old lace that have been handed down to Brittany from the sixteenth century. Her apron was of black *moire antique*, at her throat gleamed the triple chain of gold that supports the heart and cross of wedded women, and around her exquisitely-transparent coiffe was pinned the narrow circle of golden tissue that completes the beautiful costume of the women of Kermarioker.<sup>2</sup>

"Well, *Mammik*, you look as young as I do!" Pierrek exclaimed, delightedly. "They'll think you are the bride," but seeing the soft blue eyes fill with tears he stooped quickly, kissed her tenderly—a thing he had not done since his return from Iceland, for it is not etiquette to kiss one's parents in Brittany, excepting on great occasions—and ran into the house.

"Don't cry, Lanäik!" the Recteur said, kindly. "You have much to be grateful for, remember, and you know very well that Hervé is pleased, too, so don't spoil your joy and his by useless repinings!"

Instantly Lanäik's face brightened, and brushing away her tears she turned to the Recteur with an April smile.

"Oh, Monsieur le Recteur!" she explained, clasping her hands like an eager child, "you don't know how comforting it is to hear you say that. My mother used to tell me that one grieved less when one could feel one's dead to be always close by, and that's what I've been trying to do ever since my poor Hoärvé's death, but I was afraid

<sup>1</sup> Name of corsage in Finisterre.

<sup>2</sup> As explained in the author's previous volume, *The Trident and the Net*, every village in Brittany has its own peculiar costumes and customs.

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that I might be doing wrong to bring him down to earth so often to attend to me. Do you really, really mean that there is no harm in it?"

"No!" the Recteur said, gravely and decisively, "you can do him no harm, no harm at all, Lanäik. The mystery surrounding death is not quite so terrible to us Bretons, because we do not dread it. We live on with our dead, and they help us along. Be of good courage, my daughter. Life is just only a little trial God has imposed upon us to find out how we acquit ourselves before taking us into his closer care, and he condescends to let the already Blesséd come to lend us a little strength occasionally. That's all as it should be!"

Lanäik's eyes were wet and shining like stars. Suddenly she stooped and laid her lips on the dark sleeve of the priest's soutane with the lightest, shyest touch of gratitude and pure homage.

"You are a Saint, Monsieur le Recteur," she murmured, very low, "and we thank Our Lady every day who has given you to us poor ignorant people."

Now the Recteur hated praise, as already stated, and despised even more than most Bretons any display of emotion, but in spite of this firmly-rooted dislike the spontaneity and sincerity of the action moved him strangely, and although he turned roughly away there were tears in his stern eyes as he did so.

A few minutes later they were walking briskly towards the tiny creek where the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* and its crew were waiting to take them across to Enez-Pers. The men with Nédélék Houarn at their head, all of them wearing brand-new clothes and immaculate *bérets*, cheered as they approached, and Nédélék, solemnly advancing, cap in hand, pinned a knot of white roses to the lapel of Pierrek's fine, blue-serge pilot-jacket. A similar

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cluster, only forty times as big, adorned the boat's bowsprit, and away up, on the summit of the main-mast, just below the azure gala-burgee she flew, a great heart made of intertwined twigs of heather had been securely fastened like a knightly shield.

If the *Stéréden*, freshly rubbed down and still wet and shiny, was rather redolent of yesterday's catch—small as the latter had been—who cared for that? The men, looking extraordinarily jolly in their new dark-blue jerseys and cherry-colored sashes, unfurled the jib, Pierrek took the tiller, the sails flagged a second, then slowly caught the breeze, and the *chaloupe*, gracefully bending to the gentle impulse, headed for Enez-Pers lying there far away upon the blue water—a narrow bar of azure, but slightly deeper in tint than the straight supporting line of sea-rim.

Tad Karádek was standing on the mole awaiting them, tall, erect, his gray head bare. At his side were the chief men of his *c'hlan*, all dressed in their best, and wearing wedding-favors of white rosebuds in their coats. They formed an imposing company grouped there about their chief, giants in height, of haughty mien, and silent as only Bretons can be—when sober! There was a subtle constraint in the courteous reception of these men, who gave one an odd impression of brotherhood, as one saw them thus together. They displayed no hostility, expressed neither joy nor regret, but simply carried themselves with a phlegmatic dignity, that if slightly embarrassing to the new-comers, yet well became their magnificent statures and clean-cut, clean-shaven faces.

There was a moment's pause as the two parties faced each other, and even the indomitable Abbé Kornog glanced uneasily over his shoulder, not—be it said in justice—out of any personal anxiety, but somehow he

felt only half-reassured for Pierrek, who, his gray eyes flashing queerly, stood absolutely still, taller than the tallest there, head erect, one hand resting lightly on his left hip, and the curious cross between his black eyebrows showing with unusual distinctness.

At last Tad Karádek spoke:

"My welcome and salutations to my nephew that is to be!" he said, in his calm, cold voice; "and," he added, bowing low, "to the *Itron* Rouzik who compliments us by her presence, as well as to Monsieur le Recteur, our nephew's revered guardian. We feel honored to offer you all the hospitality of Enez-Pers."

With a bow worthy of the Conan's own, and in a voice just a trifle colder, Pierrek returned the politeness.

"My thanks and humble respect to the Chief of the Karádeks who has condescended to disturb himself in order to greet us here. We are in our turn deeply honored to await his pleasure!"

No court of Europe could have shown a finer sense of punctilious etiquette, or displayed greater breeding, but of a certainty cordiality was lacking.

Leading Lanäik by the hand the miller stepped forth, followed by Pierrek walking between the Curé and Nédélék Houarn, who preceded the twenty-four men of the escort marching two by two, the *arrière-garde* being formed by the crew of the *Stéréden*. A piper, the blue-and-white ribbons adorning his hat and *bigniou*<sup>1</sup> fluttering gayly in the breeze, preceded them, skirling forth a tune which sounded thin, reedy, and piercingly shrill, and to the strangers seemed almost aggressively slow of measure—something in the nature of a funeral march!

Up, up, and still higher up they rose upon the steep path

<sup>1</sup> Bagpipe.

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winding through the pinewood to the great plateau that tops the island. Far above him Pierrek could see between the stout red trunks the massive wall of the Karádek domain, crowning the sheer edge of rock. And Fäik, standing on tiptoe behind one of the narrowest loop-holes, heard the dour music of the *sonneur*,<sup>1</sup> the tramp, tramp of feet mounting steadily along the stony path, and smiled as her lover would have given all he possessed—alas, that it was not more—to see her do!

An ideal path, though a trifle abrupt, this zigzagging *sentier*, checkered by broken shafts of sunshine, and roofed by resinous branches that parted only to make way for delicious glimpses of blue sky. Squirrels brown and velvety scampered off in sudden panic at the sound of the *bigniou*, but darting little sidewise glances from their bright eyes to take stock of the amazing instrument before disappearing behind some rough trunk with quick flickings of their feathery tails.

Higher and higher wound the cortège, until at last it emerged into the open, and passed *musique en tête* into Fäik's garden—a mosaic of festive colors, composed of larkspurs and pansies, geraniums and marigolds, chrysanthemums, dahlias and asters, tall stately hollyhocks, and petunias in royal profusion, nodding in the ambient light. Without the walls it had been just a little too warm, but here there was cool, green shadow, filled with bird-songs and the penetrating smell of box-hedges. Wide open stood the door, and within its mullioned porch garlanded with clematis—Virgin's Bower, indeed—was Fäik all alone, as the custom wills it there, waiting.

At sight of her all Pierrek's irritation vanished, and well it might, for never was picture more exquisite than

<sup>1</sup> Piper.

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the one presented by that little seventeen-year-old bride in her marriage attire. Black were the tight-fitting cor-sage and skirt that cleared the dainty feet and ankles in their crimson stockings and yellow, red-heeled shoes; white as snow the broad, flat collarette, spreading winglike upon her shoulders, and she had indeed nothing to fear from the searching rays of the mid-day sun, that picked out the design of her sumptuous embroideries, made a filmy silvered cloud of her transparent lace coiffe, glanced from the melting azure and rose of her moiré apron, and drew sparks from the massive golden heart and cross at her white throat. She seemed herself a creation of summer and sky and sea, for her rare beauty partook of the delicate tints and glorious brightnesses of all.

The shrill music had abruptly ceased, the escort had fallen back, and Pierrek advanced alone until within three feet of Fäik, when he, too, stopped. Neither spoke, but stood face to face, mute and shaken by an inexpressible emotion, their glances welded to each other in a sort of supreme — almost anguished — interrogation. White now as her slender wreath of half-open rose-buds, Fäik swayed slightly, one hand holding for support to the side of the granite arch, while he, all his adoration in his eyes, dared not move so much as one more pace towards her. Then it was that Tad Karádek came forward.

"In my time," he said, with the faintest possible smile trembling on his sarcastic lips—"in my time, it seems to me that kisses were exchanged!" and he led Pierrek up the steps.

The church where the ceremony was to take place could be reached only by a narrow path running almost perpendicularly down towards the sea, for St. Kaour de Kastel - ar - Veur hangs like a swallow's nest half-way down the cliff. In bad weather it is impossible to get

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there, and even to-day one could see jets of dazzling foam rising to a level with its tiny parvise, and tumbling back again upon the giant's staircase of blue basalt that drops away below.

Walking just ahead of her uncle—for the path between the serried ranks of pines was not wide enough for two—Fäik did not once require the assistance of his ready arm, she was far too happy to mind the difficulties of the way; indeed, she scarcely noticed them. Immediately in front of her two *sonneurs* now instead of one playing as they jumped from rock to rock, produced a music of the highest originality, that seemed, however, greatly appreciated by the gulls, for clouds and clouds of them, both silver-white and silver-gray, flocked about their be-ribboned heads with rival shrieks. Or were they perchance there to attend their godson's wedding—"Pierrek, Godson of the Gulls," as very long ago old Mari-Gwezek had once called him?

From all the hamlets of Enez-Pers the people had crowded to witness this sensational wedding and do honor to the Conan, but not alone did they occupy the narrow court before the little church, for a portion of the already restricted space had been reverently reserved for the infirm and the mendicant. Here shouted and yelled a veritable *cour des miracles*—an assemblage of appalling remnants of humanity, brought there in the arms or on the backs of friends and relatives, and who bellowed ear-piercing prayers without mercy or cessation. The blind stumbled along the abrupt edge, tapping with their *pen-baz* wherever they listed, be it on the heads of those wretches half paralyzed or completely *cul-de-jattes* who crawled between everybody's legs. Some of the countenances were atrocious, huge mushy heads balanced on pitifully bent shoulders, waxlike physiognomies like pet-



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rified death-masks emaciated and hollowed, convulsed mouths and red bordered, watery eyes that seemed to shoot the glances of hell. None dared repress them, or even reprove by a word their outrageous conduct, for in Brittany the infirm, the afflicted, the penniless—and, above all, the “innocent”—are sacred. Nobody, however, appeared to notice their fearful uglinesses—one is too accustomed to such sights for that—and in the outstretched palms, in the tattered hats, and crudely painted wooden bowls aggressively extended in their inhuman claws, centimes and sous were raining.

Within the church—a rough building of huge blocks of stone, blotched and speckled by the sea-damp—the cortège, which had entered *tant bien que mal*, had reformed, and on the altar steps Pierrek and Fäik were kneeling, with Tad Karádek, Lanäik, and M. Kornog immediately behind them. The Curé of Kermarioker was merely there in his capacity of guardian to a minor, and it was the Recteur of Kaster-ar-Veur who officiated. The face of this very, very aged priest struck a note of peculiar beauty and sincerity as he stood there, draped in his long, white surplice and silver-broidered stole, his dim blue eyes resting with soft tenderness upon the young couple for whom he was invoking from the core of his great, devoted heart the blessings of all the Breton Saints.

All the while the great bell was booming overhead, terrifying the rooks out of their favorite haunts in the primitive sculptures of the ancient tower, from whence they departed with caws and croakings of hoarse anger. Suddenly the organ rolled out its deep voice, which, prisoned within the groined and arching vault, shook the hundreds of pendent *ex votos*, and scattered emotions both very religious and very human above all those bowed heads. The mass was long and well sung, and at its

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conclusion everybody rose to hear the aged Curé's allocution:

"O my children!" the trembling old lips pronounced, "the bond is tied, and you are man and wife. You, Fäik, who hitherto have given your people nought but joy and pride, and you, Pierrek, son of another shore, of whom we have heard but what is good and true, are indissolubly united before God and man. Love one another, bear with one another's faults, encourage each other's efforts to do well, and lead the pure and noble life of true children of Armór. We take you to our hearts, Pierrek Rouzik, as the one chosen by our fairest daughter. You are now as one of ourselves, for weal and woe, to the day of your death. Cherish her, my son. Spare her all unnecessary pain, shield her from all evil with those strong arms of yours. And you, Fäik, obey him and reverence him as your lord and just master, for thus alone can a wife be blessed. I thank and praise St. Kaour, patron of our island, who has granted me to live to see this day, and in his tender care do I place you both. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost. Amen."

The tremulous old hands remained poised for a few seconds above the kneeling bride and groom. Fäik and Lanäik were both crying quietly, and down the rugged cheeks of Tad Karádek two large tears silently rolled. A moment more and the procession was slowly moving out, preceded by the gorgeously apparelled beadle, his cocked hat worn fiercely *en bataille* over his rope-yarn bob-wig, his heavy staff of office cutting a merciless lane through the throng. Side by side the young couple followed him down the wide, moss-grown steps, holding each other by the little finger, she her lovely eyes down-cast, he looking straight in front of him with a very

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slight contraction of his telltale eyebrows that seemed, however, to say to all present, "Take her from me now if you dare!"

Twice around the parvise they went, scattering rich alms, for Tad Karádek liked to do things well on occasion, and then up through the pines again, climbing skillfully, as coast Bretons do, without any false steps that might have sent them headlong into the abyss, but, of course, not once thinking of picking their way. So eager were they, so young and so joyful, that almost at once they left the single-file procession, and even the adventurous *sonneurs*, far in the rear. He was immediately behind her as they breasted the most dangerous portion of the abrupt slope, and once, without her noticing it, he suddenly bent and kissed the velvet hem of her dress, as he would have the Madonna's.

Breathless and a little embarrassed, they stopped on the summit. It would not have been seemly, even now, for them to have re-entered the house alone, and so they waited side by side without a word; but at last, just as the noise of clambering feet immediately below heralded the advent of the guests, he turned suddenly to her.

"Forever!" he murmured, very low.

"Forever!" she echoed, in a whisper so faint that he only just caught it, but their eyes, which met as they had done beneath the clematis an hour earlier, clung to each other, and added all that there was yet to say.

The old house seemed to smile at them, as holding once more *par le petit doigt* they skirted the great box-hedge and came round to its southern front, a mellow sweep of color, with the mica-spangled gray of its ivy-draped walls sunlit and welcoming against the blue of the tender Breton sky. The door still stood wide open, but the *salle* as they entered it from the brilliance with-

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out, was dark at first and a little chilling. Little by little the subdued twilight turned from decorous dusk to mere softened brightness and defined the square, spacious room, with its walls of well-polished dark oak, the ceiling crossed and recrossed by heavy rafters forming irregular caissons, the floor a pavement of broad stone flags, gleaming where the feet of generation after generation had hollowed and polished it. The narrow windows set in their deep stone embrasures looked out upon the sea and let in thin-streaming vortices of gold-dust, while across one corner jutted a gigantic fireplace, with nearly effaced armorial bearings emblazoned above its broad mantel; and in the centre stood the banqueting-table, stout and broad, and heaped, as was right, with many good things.

The *salle* was for the family and distinguished guests; to the right and left other rooms were filling with the smaller fry, boys and girls mostly, who laughed merrily and joked in the peculiarly decent manner Bretons have. Roast and boiled meats, geese, ducks, chickens and game, huge pies that threatened to topple over so ambitious was their mediæval structure, jellies and cakes, fruit, sweetmeats, cider, wine, brandy, rum, and liqueurs, made up a menu that aroused universal satisfaction, and almost succeeded in unbending the far-famed taciturnity of Enez-Pers. Decidedly, Tad Karádek was nobly maintaining his honor as *Conan* of the *C'hlan*! The wines and spirits had never paid any duty, but what of that? Enez-Pers could afford to laugh at those "Dogs of Douaniers" who pester the main-land, and Enez-Pers laughed in her azure sleeve—not very loud, for fear of being heard across the bay—for the joke, though a little antiquated by now, was always so full of biting flavor!

Side by side, like the kings and queens of old, Pierrek

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and Fäik ate next to nothing, much to the miller's indignation. They looked at each other, which wholly satisfied them, and once or twice their hands met furtively beneath the ponderous table edge, when conversation had become general and they believed themselves unobserved.

Tad Karádek, on grand hospitality bent, rose at length and brought with his own hands a rotund flask of ruby-tinted wine from a side-table.

"This," he said, in the midst of an impressive silence, "should be drunk with fervor and concentration. It comes from the wreck of a Spanish vessel which in my good father's time shattered upon our rocks, and its flavor has never been endangered by taxing!"

A laugh ran round the board, heartier than any that had preceded it, and the company stood up to empty the brimming glasses.

"I drink," the Conan said, solemnly, "to the bride and groom," he bowed in the direction of Fäik and Pierrek, "to the *Itron* Rouzik," he inclined his silvered head towards Lanäik, "and to Monsieur le Recteur of Kermario-ker." Here the ceremony was concluded with a profound, semi-religious obeisance to M. Kornog, who returned the politeness by raising his own glass to the level of his forehead, as good breeding demands on such occasions. Tad Karádek straightened to his full height again, and, indicating by a pleasant smile that the formal part of the matter was over, added, suddenly:

"Now, all together, my children! Bad luck to the *Maltote*!"<sup>1</sup>

A yell, fierce and prolonged, rang deafeningly beneath the low ceiling, fairly shaking the rafters, a yell in which

<sup>1</sup> An all-embracing word, meaning everything connected with the Customs.

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sounded a strange note of exultant ferocity—in one word, that most thrilling of earthly sounds, the hostile roar of a hundred human throats.

"It's a good thing Cousin Koäder is not here!" Fäik whispered to Pierrek, in the momentary silence that followed the terrific noise; "she's married a *gablou*,<sup>1</sup> and is as proud of him as can be. She would never have forgiven this!"

"And who is Cousin Koäder?" he whispered back.

"Oh, she is Uncle Gwion's niece on the other side, and a vixen, if you want to know, but she is very well off, and holds quite a position. Her precious husband, a *brigadier de Douane*, if you please, has just been transferred to Penmarch, and that is why she could not come, but—"

She did not conclude the sentence, for all at once a reverberating crash of thunder, short and sharp like the explosion of a bomb, shook the old house. With exclamations of astonishment those nearest to the windows rushed up to look out, Pierrek and Fäik foremost, and a grand and terrible sight met their eyes. From the southwest a vast mobilization of clouds, black as some ragged pall, was swiftly advancing across the sky, which to the east was still translucently blue, shouldering before it a quivering zone of livid darkness. Even as they looked, standing hand in hand within the deep embrasure, a swift streamer of dazzling violet light shot along the bellying blackness, bisecting as it fell into branching torches of blinding orange, and the storm burst in all its insane fury. Dirling peal after dirling peal rang out like the notes of some tocsin of doom, and all the guests sat or stood in utter silence, the women holding tightly to

<sup>1</sup> Douanier, Customs official.

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their rosaries, the men grave and decidedly impressed, too, for nothing like this thunder-storm had in the recollection of any present ever interrupted a marriage-feast on Enez-Pers—and thunder-storms under such circumstances are, as everybody knows, omens of great evil.

Changed in a few minutes was the delicious aspect of Azure Island; land and sea wore now an abominable mien beneath the livid veils that spread a limitless breadth of twilight above them. Louder and louder rose the voices of the wind, racing above the short, choppy waves, already marbled and mottled with slaver past recognizing for the same that had lapped and gambolled so brightly around the Island a moment before. Unconscionable and useless seemed this imbecile transformation of beautiful things into fearful ones, and gazing upon the writhing pine-trees, the shivering plants and flowers bending or breaking as chance decreed, the mystery of this blind destruction grew oppressive beyond endurance to Fäik.

“Why should this have come to-day?” she murmured, in a stifled voice, her little figure shaking with enervation. “Will it bring bad luck to us?” Her pretty mouth was quivering, for the tension was rapidly growing to snapping point, and Pierrek knew it to be so, knew also that all those of Enez-Pers crowding behind him felt convinced that this sudden tempest embodied Heaven’s displeasure at his union with one of their maidens. The progress of the banquet had not been marked by any cordial advances to himself, and now black looks and furious scowls had gathered on wellnigh every brow, and mutterings more portentous than those of the storm were beginning to make themselves heard. A sullen resentment against such injustice rose in his heart.

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"Come, Fäik-gez," he whispered in her ear, "let us go now—at once!"

With sudden comprehension the girl quickly glanced past his shoulder and saw the threatening faces clustered around them, the lowering looks of all those pairs of eyes, and then at Pierrek himself, who, white to the lips, held his furious resentment, as they say in Brittany, clinched between his teeth. Fortunately, the big room was almost dark, and if they could succeed in casually withdrawing from the embrasure, she thought they might possibly slip unnoticed through the crowd, if not—well, these men of Enez-Pers were unaccountable in their actions! She knew their superstitions, their violence, their hatred for everything outside of their Island, and her heart stood still. They had been drinking heavily, too, and this on Enez-Pers means more than anywhere else on earth! Pierrek, she considered, was angry, but so far ignorant of his danger, and her womanly tact told her that if he once became aware of it he would stay there and face the worst, so with a *sang-froid* she would have been incapable of five minutes before, she began to edge away from the window, drawing him gently but firmly with her. Almost was the task accomplished, already the zone of light was behind them, when without any warning their way was barred by the strapping figure of her cousin Klaoda.

"Where are you for, *Diavésiad?*"<sup>1</sup> he asked, in a voice that reached right across the room. He was fighting drunk, not merely primed as most of the others were. "Trying to steal away, eh?" he continued, insolently, slurring over the ends of his words a little, but looking squarely and defiantly at Pierrek.

<sup>1</sup> Stranger who should be elsewhere.



"Mind your own business, will you?" the latter replied, contemptuously, and thrusting Fäik behind him he continued to advance. Unfortunately, the Conan and M. Kornog had just stepped into the kitchen to light their pipes, and there also were the men of the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor*, excepting Nédèlék Houarn, whose carrot head and jaunty *béret* were vaguely discernible at the other end of the room.

"Nédèlék!" Pierrek shouted, "take my mother out of this!" The big sailor instantly turned on his heel, and shouldered his way through the throng. He was not one to ask questions or reflect over the orders of his young captain.

Every one in the big *salle* had heard too, every eye was instantly turned on Pierrek, every one swung round to face him.

"Now then, are you going to let me pass?" Pierrek said, in a voice that Fäik had never heard before, low and fierce, that cut the air like the swish of a steel blade.

Klaoda laughed. "Let you pass! No, you. . . ." Here followed a string of insults toppling over one another in tipsy disorder, but still crudely betraying that the bitter jealousy of the man was at last bursting forth after months of suppression.

"Red hell of a malediction on you, you *fougeer*,"<sup>1</sup> Pierrek interrupted, and whirled the man around like a top. With a roar of rage the whole assembly leaped forward, necks craned, nostrils distended, eyes starting from their sockets—scarcely held in leash by some dim, drunken idea of fair play. The situation was getting desperate for Pierrek, who had no time to think, and not a second in which to glance behind him and see what had become of his little bride.

<sup>1</sup> Bully; braggart.

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"*Paouézid azé!*"<sup>1</sup> the Conan's voice cut in, like a crack of thunder. It immobilized every single man in the room, even Klaoda, who, held firmly by his vigorous opponent, had been plunging aimlessly about in vain attempts to trip him up. Every head was lowered, every man fell back to make room for the silver-haired Chief, who came gripping a savage-looking *pen-baz*.

"Look at this, you hounds!" he roared, brandishing it like a bolt. "I'll split the skull of the first of you who stirs! And now make way!"

For the least fraction of a second they hesitated, their pent-up fury straining to breaking-point the leash of old fealty to their Chief, of respect for his rarely-exercised but unyielding authority. But he was not one to joke with when fully aroused, and growling like dogs they slowly gave back.

M. Kornog outside the door had had his own hands full to prevent the crew of the *Stéréden* from joining the fray as they came hustling out of the kitchen with blood in their eyes—Nédélék was even now speeding the recalcitrant Lanäik towards the harbor — and nothing but the appearance of Pierrek, unharmed, and leading his bride by the hand, averted a general and murderous mêlée.

"Take her away at once," Tad Karádek was saying, hurriedly. "I can keep them quiet for a little . . . but if they drink some more—" He left his sentence unfinished, and snatching a heavy *caban* from a peg threw it over Fäik's finery. "The Saints protect you, my little girl!" he said, pushing her over the last step of the porch, and with a quick hand-grasp to M. Kornog, he disappeared into the house again.

<sup>1</sup> Halt there!

## CHAPTER XI

Her glance is like the lights that burn before Our Lady's shrine,  
Her laughter is a crystal song, her plighted troth is mine,  
We'll nest as do the hawk and mew the climbing seas above;  
St. Gwenolé, O haste the day when I may wed my love!

M. M.

THE storm was passing as swiftly as it had appeared when the little party found themselves once more on the pine-clad slope outside the wall. The sharp cracks of thunder were giving place to distant rumblings, and from the west a long, swordlike ray of yellow sunshine was striping with metallic tints the belly of a flying bank of clouds.

Fäik's emerald eyes were black with excitement, and her little face was still pale, but she had preserved from the first the curious muteness of the women of Brittany during moments of stress, and now walked steadily and unfalteringly between her husband and the Recteur. Behind them strode the crew of the *Stéréden*, muttering curses and imprecations, for they could not get over the humiliation of having been prevented from "mixing it up" with "those hell-souled parishioners up yonder!"

In order, for the sake of Fäik, to avoid the beaten track and possible unpleasant encounters, they followed a narrow rut winding between the rugged trunks—a mere wrinkle in the brown covering of the abrupt slope. There were big rocks to be circumvented, jumps to be taken over fallen masses of branches all entangled in the long, pliant arms of vigorous briars, black-thorn thickets that

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stretched out net-works of deep-biting thorns to bar their way—surely no bride had ever had so strange a home-going! At length, however, the task was accomplished; Pierrek lifted his *douce*<sup>1</sup> over the last obstacle, and set her down upon the wet sand of the beach, where they had met on an unforgettable afternoon a little over a year ago.

As fast as their feet could carry them they skirted the ever-broadening onrush of the waves, and, a little breathless, reached the pier to which the *Stéréden* was moored just as the angry red orb of the setting sun plunged beneath the horizon line. Standing upon the wet steps was Lanäik, swathed in a long, oil-skin coat four times too large for her, but a Lanäik entirely different from the sweet little woman they were accustomed to, watched over by the towering form of Nédèlék, who for the last half-hour had actually been forced to use strength in order to prevent her from rushing back to her children's rescue.

"And now here they are safe and sound!" he cried, triumphantly, waving a hand like an out-spread sail in the direction of the hurrying group. "What did I tell you! Is there any sense in getting yourself in such a state, Madame Lanäik?"

"State or no state, I'll remember you in my prayers, Nédèlék Houarn!" she said, with, for her, an extraordinarily vicious toss of the head. "A mother's place is by her son's side, and if you hadn't been such a brute . . ."

"I had to carry her down the whole hill!" poor Nédèlék complained, in tones of the deepest injury, to Pierrek. "I'd never have thought she was so strong. Why, she fought me like a cat every step of the way . . . sure she did . . . and she so gentle usually, a little bit of a woman

<sup>1</sup> Sweetheart.

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no taller than my boot . . . the devil take me if *I* ever get married!"

M. Kornog, and even Pierrek, who had not unclosed his teeth since their informal exit from the farm, burst out laughing. "I have no doubt," the priest remarked, placidly, "that the little voyage across the bay will calm her down, for if I'm not mistaken we are in for a head-wind all the way—and look at that ground-swell!"

Quite unmindful of this encouraging prophecy, Lanäik was examining Fäik and Pierrek all over as if in search of some until then overlooked death-wound, her pretty, oval face still crimson with anger, her soft blue eyes flashing fire. "It's a shame—a crying shame," she exclaimed at last. "Oh! if I were a man, I'd—I'd—"

"Why Lanäik Rouzik," M. Kornog interrupted, "it's a good thing the *gars* can't hear you. I had trouble enough to prevent them from murder!" He cast a hasty look at Pierrek and his crew, who, choosing their time, had sprung on board the tossing boat and were making ready to cast off. "Here, hurry up!" he said to the two women. "Let's aboard; we have no time to lose if my ears are good for anything!" A confused noise of voices and running feet was indeed becoming plainly audible somewhere on the slopes above. Fortunately, those in the boat could hear nothing, thanks to the swash of the waves beating against the pier, and M. Kornog, excellent sailor that he was, seizing the moment when the *chaloupe* was flung up on a level with his feet, threw first Lanäik and then Fäik like bundles into Nédèlék's and Pierrek's arms, while two of the others with stout poles fended the boat away from the cascading masonry.

Dizzily the two women, clutching the runners, saw the foam-bespattered mole rush past them; then the sails

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filled, and the heavy bows took the water with a thud as the *Stéréden* headed gallantly for home.

"It's just as well they shouldn't have noticed that noise," M. Kornog muttered to himself while trying to arrange a shelter for the women to crouch in during what must prove a long and difficult voyage, for the sea, unlike the now transparently pellucid sky, had not calmed down. As he completed his arrangements he happened to glance back at the island, and caught his breath. The crenellated cliffs they had admired that morning frowned now dark and grim above a smother of boiling foam and bottle-green water, the belt of pines looked black as ink above the dark pillars of their trunks, and between them, running, shouting, yelling open-mouthed, stumbling as they scattered, and cursing when they met, a mob of frenzied men led by Klaoda was descending like an avalanche.

Pierrek saw them at the same moment. His hand instinctively tightened on the tiller; then his glance fell upon his little bride, on his mother, and the sacrifice was made. Sooner run away like a coward than endanger their safety, and the *chaloûpe* rising to the waves plunged unchecked into the gathering gloaming.

"I'll come back! I'll come back!" he muttered, black hatred in his eyes and in his heart. "Surely yes—by St. Kaour, their patron, and by St. Hoärvé of Kermario, I'll come back, never fear!"

When the *Stéréden* at last reached her anchorage the great white autumn moon had long since taken up her nightly task of sweeping clear the sky—eating her supper of clouds, we say out there—but a huge broken rack of uncompromising blackness spread behind the twin peaks, with here and there a thin spot where stars twinkled through. A thousand night odors of earth and sea



THE CURÉ'S LITTLE POSTERN DOOR





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bathed the sleeping village in delicious fragrance as the bride and groom, escorted by Lanäik and the Recteur, slowly made their way towards the old house. Their own home—a present to his niece from the rich miller—was farther up the coast by half a mile, on one of the farthest spurs of ruined Kermario's rock-base, but before going on there they stopped at Lanäik's for supper, and the subsequent performance of a little ceremony, without which no Breton wedding-day is allowed to pass.

What with fatigue and excitement, it was but a slender meal that was eaten, and soon all arose for the observance of the rite, the repetition of prayers for the repose of kindred dead. The Recteur had remained with them to do them the honor of conducting this little service of the heart, and, standing at the head of the table whereon the husband and father had breathed his last, he began:

"This is for Jeannik and Sulian Rouzik, the builders of this house: *Requiem æternam dona eis, Domine, et lux perpetua luceat in eis!*" The beautiful Latin words were recited to the end, and then repeated with varying preambles: "This is for Silvest Rouzik, lost at sea off the coast of Iceland—this is for Riok Rouzik, lost at sea on the Newfoundland Banks—this is for Judikäel Rouzik, drowned in a storm off the coast of Penmarch, and for his wife, Paoläik, who died in childbirth at the news of his death—this is for Oän-Gweled, drowned at sea—" until each of the departed had been piously remembered, and the beloved name of Yan-Hoärvé Rouzik, mentioned last of all, had brought tears to every eye.

The wind had risen again as Pierrek and Fäik bade a fond *kenávo* to their mother, and, alone for the first time that long, eventful day, began to climb towards their pretty rock nest.

Walking quickly, the young couple threaded the little

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zigzag path that for eight hundred yards skirts the upper beach and then meanders up the flank of the cliff. Now and then the frightened scuttle of some large crab, dislodged from his retreat by the noise of their steps and retiring at full speed over the pebbles, made them laugh, and when they reached the first cornice they paused a moment to recover their breath, for the wind blew sharply from the offing and the ascent was steep. Suddenly, from the darkness of a near-by fissure, an enormous bird, dazzled by the moon, flew literally on top of them, startling Fäik so that had it not been for Pierrek's quick snatch at her arm she would have gone headlong over the edge.

"A booby<sup>1</sup>—a bad-luck bird!" she cried, with a little anguished shiver. "Oh, Pierrek! what did he want?"

"Nothing, my little girl; we frightened him, that's all," was the quiet answer, but in his heart of hearts the young sailor was not reassured, for these huge white sea-fowl of crazy renown are considered of evil omen when they approach one too closely.

Thus it happened that they approached the miller's gift to Fäik not quite so blithely as they had left Lanäik's door. It was a sumptuous one indeed for impecunious Brittany—a queer, irregular old house, built of rough granite on rough granite. The entrance was low-porched—there were two steps down into the stone-flagged kitchen, from which opened two more large rooms, one on each side (an incredible luxury for Kermarioker), and another long apartment at the back, giving on a small walled garden. The roof was of slate—another almost unheard-of thing in those regions—the furniture, too, was unusually good; one or two oaken chests of great

<sup>1</sup> White gannet. The Breton "Mor-waz". (sea-goose).

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antiquity sent from Enez-Pers, together with some massive tables and chairs, a couple of exquisitely-carved, silver-hinged *lits-clos*, a ponderous "grandfather's" clock, with a bland face surrounded by very creditably-painted pink roses, a *vaissellier* loaded with crockery of a highly-decorative order, in a primitive way that was quaint and attractive, and in the corner of honor the little bride's gigantic clothes-press, filled with tall piles of linen, heavy woollen blankets, and fine new garments, not to mention several deep-laid rows of six-livre silver pieces that composed her *dot*. Such magnificence had kept Kermarioker gaping with amazement for a week, and Mari-Gwezek had gone so far as to denounce the miller's lavishness as nothing short of sinful! Why, the place was fit for a queen, she had declared to her master, arms akimbo, face crimson with indignation, on her return from visiting it, and had been once more well laughed at for her pains!

Just now, bathed by the great, silvery moon and fanned by the swift, cool night wind that rustled the dew-spangled leaves of the currant bushes and geraniums on each side of the door, it looked so ideally snug that their spirits rose once more. On one broad window-ledge, wedged securely by the wooden shutter-bar, a magnificent fuchsia in full bloom, sent yesterday by M. Kornog, rang its welcome from a hundred little tossing bells of white and rose, and with a little exclamation of delight Fäik stopped to gaze at it.

They were both very silent as, the door once closed, they turned to look at each other. Both trembled a little, unable as yet to realize the fulness of their happiness. Very gently, with a timidity that sat well on this tall, broad-shouldered, bold-eyed youth, Pierrek bent and kissed Fäik. The beating of their hearts seemed to

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them plainly audible, in spite of the grave "tick-tack—tick-tack" of the rose-garlanded clock in the corner; outside, the great, invisible orchestra of wind and waves continued its lonely music, and suddenly the lover's strong arms closed for the first time around the slender form of his beloved.

## CHAPTER XII

Whatever minds unquiet may allege  
Anent monotony and homely ways,  
Though change doth oft restore a blunted edge,  
The happiest are uneventful days.

M. M.

"AND so you are perfectly happy? You regret nothing, and do not blame me yet for having yielded to you?"

Tad Karádek turned about and faced his companion with a questioning, inflexible eye. He and Fäik were lounging side by side over the garden wall that bright golden afternoon of middle November, *Miz-Du*, the Bretons call it—the black month—but the appellation is not always correct.

Fäik raised her mutinous little face, and looked at her uncle with an air of lazy amusement. "I thought you wouldn't need to ask such a question!" she said, in her clear, merry voice. "You have only to look at me to be reassured!"

"The Saints know you do not inspire one with pity!" he replied, hardly able to refrain from laughing, "and this being so, I suppose I've had my sail for nothing, since happy people are best left to themselves!—Yes, you look uncommonly well!"

"Now that's what I call unkind, Uncle Gwion!" she cried, reproachfully, turning deliberately and leaning her back against the wall to scan him better. "Would you sooner have found me here in tears bemoaning my ill-

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luck in marrying the handsomest and best man in all Brittany?" Her face was serious, but her eyes danced with fun.

"No," he said, curtly enough, "I'm glad to find it's all nonsense!"

"Oh!" Fäik exclaimed, the mirth dying out of her eyes, "so there's been some one trying to do mischief! Who is it, Tadik? You must tell me, you know!"

The miller, upright and preternaturally solemn in his fine broadcloth clothes, was evidently cogitating with himself as to the wisdom of silence. He was vexed to have so far betrayed himself: he the prudent man par excellence; and yet perhaps it would be best for him to make a clean breast of the matter which had brought him to the main-land for the first time in twenty years.

"Well—" he began, hesitatingly, after a pause, during which Fäik had been examining him keenly, "as a matter of fact the whole thing is not worth whipping a cat over, but if you must know, some one of the family has told me that you were not being treated well here in Kermarioker!"

"Some one of the family! It must be Klaoda!" she asserted, her dark, straight eyebrows contracting angrily.

"No, not Klaoda; we don't speak excepting when we absolutely cannot avoid it, and, what's more, I haven't seen him much since your marriage-day!"

"A fine fool he made of himself then!" she interrupted, contemptuously, shrugging her shoulders. "Oh! I often told you he's a black-souled villain, is my cousin Klaoda!"

"He is not a villain, Fäik, but a very unhappy man, who, when all's said and done, loved you profoundly. However, I suppose it would be foolish to expect pity from you in that quarter."

"You may well say so!" she muttered, through her

white teeth. "Think I'll ever forgive him?—Not I; he was too ugly for that—and without the least reason!"

Tad Karádek said nothing. Where was the use of explaining? "A woman in love has no mercy for other than the right man," a Breton proverb very rightly states. So, indeed, what was the use? He drew in one whistling breath through his teeth, as one may who remembers that years before he himself has been seared by the same feminine injustice, and continued to look straight in front of him at the glorious prospect of gayly-capering waves and cloudless sky.

Fäik was tapping the ground with one tiny sabot, waiting with no patience at all for him to speak.

"I believe," she burst out at last, "somebody has stolen your tongue as well as your peace of mind, Uncle Gwion. How long do you think I'm going to stand here on hot coals?"

He glanced at her heightened color and the flashing annoyance lighting up her wonderful eyes, and smiled.

"And now you are laughing at me!" she said, fiercely.

"I, Fäik?"

"Of course you are! Can't you tell me who it is?"

"There is very little to tell, I assure you, my child. No use for you to look so furious. It's simply this: Madek Judik, my head-man, went over to Sant-Padarn last week to fetch a large consignment of wheat, and while there met Ervoän Le Hurec, your cousin Koäder's husband, who—"

"Ervoän Le Hurec!" Fäik interposed. "That gold-laced coxcomb!"

"If you like! Well, that 'gold-laced coxcomb' told Madek that his wife was greatly incensed at your marriage; and further declared that at the *Pardon* of Roz-canval you were observed to look very ill and wretched;

that your husband, who had been drinking too much, ill-used and scolded you, and in one word—"

"And you believed that! You, my shrewd uncle Gwion! I'm sorry for you, I am, if you did, because you must be losing your mind—I ill-used by Pierrek—or by any one else for the matter of that—pshaw!"

"I did not believe it, Fäik, but still I could not understand why any one should invent—absolutely invent—such a thing! That's why I came to-day; just to see if possibly you were ill—or disappointed, perhaps, at your present position—it's a change, you must confess, from Enez-Pers!"

"Now look here, Tadik," the young wife said, resolutely planting herself in front of him, with shining eyes and an indignant toss of the head, "I'd best tell you once for all, that I am the happiest woman that ever drew breath! Everybody has been feasting me and making much of me. . . . Even Mari-Gwezek, the most ill-tempered old woman in Kermarioker, is all smiles when I come to see her at the presbytery. My mother-in-law is a little saint . . . and as to Pierrek!" She clasped her small brown hands tightly together in her anxiety to find suitable expressions with which to describe the beloved. And then in a voice vibrating with tenderness:

"You don't know what that *gars* of mine is, Tadik. . . !" How lovely she was! What was it that made her so different from all others, that illumined her face so marvellously? What eager spirit was it that darkened her eyes to that chatoyant shade of gemlike green? She put one hand on her uncle's sleeve, and looked up into his grim face.

"My Pierrek! He is the sunshine of my life; he is like a part of myself, the heart of my heart and soul of my soul! Meek he certainly is not, Uncle Gwion, thank God



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for that; but violent, or harsh—and a drunkard—he! Why, all day long, while he is out at sea, his tenderness stays with me, the tone of his voice is in my memory—” She paused, extending both her rounded arms, as though this paragon of all the virtues were standing there in the flesh ready to be clasped to that high-beating heart of hers, and then let them gradually fall to her sides with a little laugh of pure joy.

“What a sparrow’s brain I’ve got!” she cried, “to imagine I could tell it all to you!”

Open-mouthed, the amazed miller was gazing at her. That wild, sweet laughter of hers, the purest and most innocent thing in the world, rang in his ears like some long-yearned-for music; her exquisite genuineness, her loyalty, her fearless manner of speech, made her irresistibly winsome and held him as by a charm. “A lucky lad that Pierrek!” he thought, and aloud he said:

“You need tell no more, my dear, I am entirely convinced. Only I would advise you if you should ever come across that good Koäder again to keep her under surveillance; she will bear watching!”

“The cat!” Fäik muttered, with a complete change of expression, “I never could bear her! I can remember well how she used to bully me when I was quite little. During mother’s last illness she managed everything, and—oh! how unpleasant and ill-tempered she was!”

“I dare say she is so still,” the miller said, dryly. “She’s a dark-eyed Bretonne, and that invariably means nothing good! But tell me, Fäik, you are not going to any more *Pardons* just now, are you?”

“Why? Is there any harm in that?” the girl asked in astonishment.

Tad Karádek shrugged his shoulders and looked rather embarrassed.

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"No, of course not. What harm could there be? Still, so young a bride as yourself, you know. . . ."

"Are *Pardons* meant only for old and staid people, cripples and beggars?" Fäik demanded. "I should have thought that young people like Pierrek and myself were just the ones to enjoy a fête-day; but you are of a different opinion, it seems, Tadik. Has Koäder advised that we should never dance, or sing, or laugh any more, my poor lad and me?"

"Oh, curse Koäder!" the miller roughly exclaimed, "I'm not thinking of her at all, but if you must know that too, there is . . . well, a feeling of . . . of irritation against your husband . . . of jealousy if you like . . . that, provided you met some of the young men from Enez-Pers, might lead to another . . . mix up! Now do you understand?"

"And do you think, Uncle Gwion, that I am going to make Pierrek spend his life trying to avoid those murderous ruffians of yours . . . oh well, you don't know me then! I hope they'll meet one of these days when the *chaloupe's* crew is with us. Then they'll get their punishment! I've been aching to see it happen ever since my wedding-day!"

"I never knew that you could be so savage, Fäik!" her uncle remonstrated. "You little demon! What's come to you, anyhow?"

"Come to me?" she echoed. "Sense; plain, ordinary common-sense, that's all. I'll denounce them as dangerous characters, your young men, Uncle Gwion, if you can't keep them in order—not to the police, of course—you know that I'm not an informer nor a traitor, but to the *gars* here, and then we'll have a regular pitched battle—I'd like that!" she concluded, licking her rosy lips in joyful anticipation of coming carnage.

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"As I hope for a place in Paradise," the miller said, stepping back to look at her, "I don't know what to think of you to-day, Fäik! You certainly surprise me. What in the world do you want to fan a smouldering feud like that for? Once started, it would be a slaughter and butchery that nothing could stop, not even I—not even your friend the Recteur, who has got a famous grip—not even St. Kaour himself, if he came down from Heaven on purpose!"

"Well, then, you must prevent your *C'hlan* from interfering with my husband, that's all, Tadik, because I won't have him bothered—never mind at what cost. I've made up my mind to that anyway!"

Her eyes were full of rage, her little fists were clinched, her proud, red-gold head was erect, and in her young voice that always reminded her uncle of crystal-clear water, there were surprising ripples of concentrated fury. He stared at her glowing face, for the second time in an hour completely nonplussed.

"I must go now!" he said, abruptly. "I'd quarrel with you if I stayed any longer, I'm afraid, Fäik, and, moreover, I still have to go and visit your mother-in-law and Monsieur le Recteur, so good-bye for the present. I'll be back in an hour!"

Something in the old man's face disturbed the girl, and she intercepted him, standing in the middle of the path. "Was I cross?" she asked, naïvely. "You did not think it was with you, Uncle Gwion, did you? I wouldn't hurt you for all the treasures of Ste. Anne d'Auray!"

What cared Tad Karádek now for past disappointments, present anxieties, or possible future mishaps! When his little Fäik spoke like that the rest of the world mattered nothing at all. "Child, child," he said, forgetting his momentary annoyance, forgetting his turbulent

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*C'hlan*, "you never can hurt me whatever you say or do. Your old uncle, my little girl, loves nothing in the world but you, as you very well know, and his home is always as ready for you as his heart, feuds or no feuds, remember that!" He patted her shoulder tenderly, and in an instant was striding down the cliff path, Fäik looking after him with eyes full of tears.

"I'm sorry!" she murmured. "I'm sorry . . . I shouldn't have worried him, poor old man . . . it's too bad . . . the first time he has come to see us, too! Never mind, though . . . Pierrek will make everything all right with him to-night. It's nearly time for him to be coming home," she concluded, with a sudden smile, "so I must make myself tidy."

Running into the house, she chose another *guimpe*, finer yet in texture, and more intricately embroidered than the one she had worn during working-hours, put on a new apron, gave a few deft little pats and strokes to her snowy coiffe, and then sprang blithely into the sunshine again, her small sabots clattering merrily on the rocky path as she ran. She went swiftly down the narrow track, jumping from stone to stone, afraid to be late. And late she was, for just as she was about to reach the level road Pierrek, preceded by a cheerful view-halloo, hove in sight, a fish-basket slung on his shoulder.

"You lazy girl!" he laughed, coming straight up to her through the tangle of knee-high sea-thistles that flourished on the upper beach, "what kept you?"

Fäik, almost ready to cry with vexation, was hanging her pretty head.

"What!" Pierrek laughed. "Pouting, are you, Madame Pierrek Rouzik, and just to-day, when we've hauled in such a good catch!" Then suddenly raising his deep eyes to hers, as she stood perched on the last

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boulder of the out-cropping spur a little above him, he threw one arm around her and lifted her down as easily as a baby. "Anything amiss, Fäik-gez?" he asked, anxiously, still retaining his hold of her.

"No, no!" she said, quickly, with one large tear in each eye, and a radiant smile on her lips, a veritable April face, and a surprisingly seductive one, "it's only that I'm so angry to have missed being on the jetty when you arrived. It's all Uncle Gwion's fault!"

"Uncle Gwion!" Pierrek exclaimed, much surprised. "You don't mean that he is actually here!"

"Yes, worse luck!" she grumbled, leaning against him. "At least he is calling on Monsieur le Recteur and on mother now—but he was with me until a quarter of an hour ago—and I didn't think it was so late!"

"Uncle Gwion! Fancy his leaving his old island to come and see my little witch! But you always work miracles, Fäik!"

They had turned now, and were walking slowly up the path, he with his arm still about her, she prattling away with an indescribable mirth and sweetness in her voice, as she told him all the little events of the day, carefully omitting, however, any reference to Cousin Koäder, or Cousin Klaoda and his band of supporters. Well did she know that if Pierrek were once convinced that the animosity of which he had had such marked proofs on his wedding-day was still as keenly alive, nothing could prevent him from collaring the first man from Enez-Pers he met. He was of hard material, was this youthful husband of hers, of the material that never gives in, but dies fighting and—cursing, quite unafraid of meeting its Maker, and game to the last. Now, in spite of her bold statements to Uncle Gwion, deep down in her heart she dreaded to endanger her Pierrek's life. Therefore, un-

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like the generality of women, she beat down the temptation of telling all she knew—if not more—and kept her mouth shut. Perhaps, she thought, the whole thing would gradually blow over; time would bring forgetfulness and peace, and Klaoda cease from keeping his boon-companions' resentment at fever-heat. Nevertheless, she did not feel quite easy in her mind.

In two weeks from that time the *Pardon* of Kermarioker was to take place; a grand occasion to which both she and Pierrek had been looking forward with the glee of the children they still were, and one which, thank the Saints, the most timorous prudence could not prompt her to avoid. No one in Kermarioker ever stayed away from its greatest fête!

Four days before this auspicious occasion the *Stéréden-Ab-Vor* was on her way to harbor after a wretched catch, rolling to a heavy, sullen swell, and creaking dismally throughout all her middle-aged ossature. The time was, maybe, two hours past sundown—they had been much delayed, hauling in a refractory net—a storm was threatening, and the sky, over where the moon should have been about to rise had circumstances permitted, was getting as black as a pall. There was a stiff breeze blowing, too, from the nor'west, the huge bay was filled with a chaos of short tumbling seas, and when the rain began to fall in large cold drops, like splashes out of a bucket, Pierrek, bending over the tiller, swore aloud! It seemed evident that a good deal of tacking would have to be gone through before the Kermarioker lights hove in sight, and the thought of Fäik worrying at home pinched his heart.

Suddenly the gray darkness thickened and took shape a few fathoms ahead, and another *chaloupe* drove down upon the *Stéréden*, shearing so close to windward it

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seemed a positive miracle that a collision should have been avoided.

Pierrek's presence of mind in jamming the tiller down just in the nick of time had saved his boat, but he was in a towering rage, and standing up he reeled off a swift string of objurgations among which the names of many Saints and more devils hurtled with convincing force. "Why the —— did they carry no light? What murder was afoot in their —— of a tank?" etc. All this bursting from his throat as he balanced to and fro to avoid the kicks of the viciously bucking waves that threatened to tip him headlong over the side.

Almost had the strange craft leaped away into the gloom. But the Fates could not let so promising a chance of trouble slip by, for, during one of the downward plunges of the *Stéréden*, whose mast wagged rakishly to every swell, a yellow pencil of light from the swaying hurricane-lamp caught Pierrek right in the face, and a loud howl of recognition rose from the fast disappearing unknown.

"Rouzik! Rouzik! It's Rouzik!" came in yells through the foam-lit dusk, and in an instant half a dozen huge oars thrown hastily out, and moving out of time like the legs of some ungainly insect suddenly aroused, began to back water in the craziest possible fashion.

"What ails them?" Pierrek shouted to Nédélék Houarn, who, bending half-across the side, was peering hungrily into the thickening night.

"Smugglers from Enez-Pers, by God!" bawled the red-headed second, in a voice that rang across the charging breakers like the bellow of a mad bull. Indeed, in a moment more, what with the quarrel of the elements, and that of the humans tossing about in their respective cockleshells, there was enough noise to supply a dozen

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battle-fields. Any ordinary beings would have subsided and let their private disagreements drop under such a combination of circumstances. These did not. They faced one another with scorching tongues, with battering oars and truculent boat-hooks. None were amateurs at that sort of game, and as to the smugglers, they were all men who for years had carried their lives in their hands, and had never set sail without risking a chance of landing amid a bristle of guns and cutlasses. Nevertheless, the crew and *Patron* of the *Stéréden* held their own, and thumped their adversaries into a disorganized heap again and again, viciously using every available weapon of attack and defence . . . and there were casualties!

For a moment or two during the hottest part of the encounter the flanks of the two smacks ground and bumped against each other to the pitchings of the waves, and in one of the bigger rolls the *Stéréden's* bowsprit fouled the other's loosely swinging tiller, snapping it in two like a carrot. It was then that heavy stone water-jugs and brandy-bottles were used as missiles, splintering against animate or inanimate matter as chance decreed. This ammunition exhausted, as a heavy sea flung them apart once more Pierrek jumped to his own helm and did his level best to ram the disabled enemy, but just at that moment the squall burst in all its fury and the fight was indeed over. Caught unprepared, both war centres, after nearly capsizing at the first stroke of the blast, went lunging and squattering helplessly during several anxious minutes, when each found itself alone with a howling darkness, and glad enough to be on top of the water at all.

It was only when they had secured a breathing spell, that Pierrek and two of the *équipage* discovered that they were wounded—not seriously, as luck would have it, but



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still all three were dripping with good red blood. Pierrek from a jagged scalp wound inflicted by a flying bottle, and Laumec and Fantek, two strapping lads of nineteen and twenty, from boat-hook punctures. What would Fäik and Lanäik say?

The air grew thicker and thicker with spray and driving rain, the sea with battling hills of blackness streaked with glimmering white, but bruised and bleeding and sore though they were, the lads from Kermarioker fought their way home, singing as loud as the wind permitted an old Chouan song, full of fire and flame, and brimstone and gore, as good Breton *gars* should do.

## CHAPTER XIII

Drowsing upon the heath in order fair  
Gray Druid stones outwatched the centuries,  
Some sternly straight, some nodding here and there  
Above the gorse that hid their granite knees,  
Taking the sun-warmth and the wafting breeze,  
And some, forgetful of the charge with pain  
They once had kept, mid vines and blackberries,  
Lulled by the lark and throstle, long had lain;  
Wrapped in an ancient dream, nor e'er should rise again.

Perchance the last, of all that company,  
Were wisest, for when all doth change and fade  
Why keep unstained a useless loyalty?  
Better by far to be in slumber laid,  
Than still enduring, old, yet unafraid,  
To mark the pathos of forgotten things!  
They who survive new times are ever made  
To serve new masters—lo, where ivy clings  
A Christian Saint enthroned amid the mystic rings!

M. M.

UPON the wide *Lande*—that mysterious waste of  
whin and gorse and heather whereon so many chapters  
of Brittany's history have been unrolled—about two  
miles down the cliff-girt coast to the south of Kermari-  
oker, stands a huge statue of St. Hervé, surrounded, curi-  
ously enough, by an inner semicircle and an outer far-  
stretching range of wonderful Druidic stones.

This mixture of Christianity with what preceded it is  
by no means unusual there, and the grayness of granite  
crucifixes melts well into that of those older religious

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monuments that give to unchangeable Armorica so unique a *cachet*.

To-day the towering statue was surrounded by a canopy composed of russet sails, and surrounded on three sides by a drapery of corn-flower blue fishing-nets midriffed by crossed oars, while a close-linked chaplet of anchors ringed in the space where Monsieur le Recteur would presently stand, clad in his finest chasuble and stole, to pronounce the benediction. Great clusters of *Huel-Var*,<sup>1</sup> the immemorially-reverenced mistletoe, held in place at St. Hervé's feet long fringes of golden genesta and rose-hued wild verbenas, which, as every one knows, is a blossom consecrated to this particular Saint, and a great charm against all evil things.

A slight haze lay over the *landes*, but already the early mist was lifting itself away at the rising sun's behest, and in earth and air and ocean there was a subtle buoyancy which, if it told of coming winter, had nothing wintry about it as yet.

Nobody was near, not even the *équipé* which had worked all night long over St. Hervé's bower, only from the lip of the falaise two coast-guards might have been seen pacing backward and forward upon the beach with a measured tread acquired at sea, looking keenly about them, for on *Pardon* days boats from all the little smugglers' islands near and far congregate here, and eyes of additional vigilance are imperatively needed.

As the morning wore on black specks no bigger than sea-birds began far away to dot the paths that wound across the heath, some singly, others in serried ranks like files of gigantic migrating ants, some surmounted by fluttering little squares of brilliant color that were banners

<sup>1</sup> "Plant that comes from the sky," otherwise "Heavenly Grass."

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and oriflammes sparkling with gold and silver embroidery, some again bristling with raised *pen-baz* showing no thicker than fine wire at such a range, or else with huge blessed candles unlighted as yet, but creating a glancing, moving blur of whiteness as their bearers slowly advanced.

On the opposite side also a multitude of sails, white, red, and tawny, came flecking the wide blue shield of waters, and presently the crowd was arriving by dozens, scores, and hundreds. The immediate objective-point for the vast majority of the pilgrims was a deep fold of the *landes* half a mile to the rear of the great statue, where all night long preparations had been going on for the mundane attractions of the festival, and swarms of enterprising individuals were now putting the finishing-touches to booths of every size and description, containing multifarious provision for the amusement and refreshment of the beholder and the depletion of his pocket. Most of the shows would not be open till a little later, but the vendors' stalls were ready, and hot bread and cakes, pears and apples and plums, huge brown loaves marked with a cross raised in sugared dough, golden grapes and purple, onions in long festoons and pyramids of figs, cheap jewelry, medals, rosaries, pottery ranging from round-bellied *marmites* to statuettes of St. Hervé brightly gilded and colored, could all be obtained there for a few sous. The newly-arrived were already chaffering, laughing, and haggling over these articles of trade, vituperating, when the prices failed to meet the exigencies of their purses, in at least five different sorts of Breton, for, apart from the fundamental "Leonard" of Finisterre, "Cornouaillais," "Trécorois," "Vannetais," and their many subdivisionary dialects flew around at a frantic rate. Commend me to a usually silent people

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when some great occasion or emotion breaks down the bonds of their taciturnity!

Already an army of beggars and cripples had taken possession of every path-edge, and here and there some sightless wretches wandered about amid the crowd like souls in torment, violently tapping the ground with their long sticks, and droning out in deafening nasal tones invocations to charity of which at present no one took any notice. Their hour would come later at the feet of St. Hervé the Compassionate!

The costumes to-day were really wonderful in color and variety, comprising an almost complete armorial of the Breton peasantry, and ranging from the short crimson petticoats, brilliantly-flowered aprons, and close-fitting gold-filigreed coiffes of Pont-l'Abbé, to the flying brodered jacket and wide-winged *henin* of Morlaix, or the long-fringed silk shawl and thickly-pleated skirts of the women of Vitré. From Plogonnec came men in wide white breeches and blue cloth jackets with a "Holy Dove" superbly worked in yellow floss in the middle of the back, and waistcoats constellated by row after row of *fleur-de-lysé* silver buttons. Salt-workers there were, too, proudly flashing their scarlet jackets and multi-colored chenille hat-ornaments in the sunshine, while white-shirted *metayers*,<sup>1</sup> in sober, velvet-edged browns and blacks, lounged lazily around with their womankind, who seemed almost too puritanical under their nunlike caps of plain lawn.

Groups of sailors and fishermen, blue-jerseyed and red-sashed, with dark-blue *bérêts* of exactly the same shade as the cloth of their long, "bell-muzzled" trousers, were an almost pleasant relief to the gorgeousness of most of the

<sup>1</sup> Farmers.

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people present, and imparted a singular jauntiness to the scene. Most of these stopped, transfixed by admiration and covetousness, before the pink-and-white-striped tent of a little, shrunk, brown old man who was selling glazed images of popular maritime Saints, to be nailed to the main-masts of fishing-smacks. In a feeble, cracked, but extraordinarily-insinuating voice he cried aloud his wares:

"Come, children, buy a two-sous St. Gildas . . . it's for nothing, as you see, and will insure fine weather and no head-winds . . . or would you rather pay thirty centimes and own one of these glorious images of St. Peter, Father of the Holy Church, shipwrecked in the furious waters of the Orient but conquering their ferocity, as you also will be enabled to do, my sons, if you possess this precious memento. . . . Here is another, all blue and gold. It represents, as you can see for yourselves, our good St. Kadoc's return to Brittany. Behold the glittering mitre and the solid gold crozier by the aid of which he rowed himself across the tossing main. . . . And now let me show you St. Tugdual, who—" On and on rambled the aged story-teller, the big children in *bérets* listening delightedly and making extensive purchases, which they refused energetically to let him wrap up, so that they might not for an instant lose sight of their new treasures.

A little farther on a red-and-gold wheel of fortune whirled ceaselessly beneath impatient hands, and every time a prize was secured by one of the circle surrounding it shouts of joy went up to the very skies. Right in front of this stood Pierrek and Fäik, hand in hand, as usual, she exquisite in her wedding-habit and lace *guimpe*, her pretty head erect, her dimpled cheeks deliciously flushed—a living, breathing poem of Brittany, made woman, he

handsomer and more nonchalant than ever, with that curious little disdainful curl of the lips that became him so well, and that superb way of squaring his broad shoulders, above the level of most heads there.

Four times Fäik twirled the fortune-wheel, and four times she won, her last venture making her the enraptured possessor of a really very pretty white satin banerette hemmed in soft pale green, with a beautiful woman's face painted upon it. How so dainty and distinguished a bibelot had found its way there must remain a mystery, but there it was, and, stepping out of the crowd, Fäik drew Pierrek to an isolated corner to look at it more closely.

"Oh! Pierrek, look, look; she has green eyes like mine!" the delighted girl exclaimed, "and copper-colored hair, too! *Ma Doué*,<sup>1</sup> *Ma Doué*, who can it be? A queen, think you, or perhaps our Duchess Anne herself when she was quite young?"

With a laugh Pierrek bent over her shoulder to inspect the marvel, and gave a little gasp.

*"Ahès, breman-Mary-Morgan  
E skend an oabr, d'an noz, a gan l'?"*

he slowly deciphered from the gilt lettering beneath. "Ahès<sup>2</sup> herself!" he said, in an awed tone; "but yes, Fäik, she looks very much like you—oh! very much!" and stepping back a pace he gazed alternately at the fancy portrait of King Grallon's siren-daughter and at his own bonnie little wife. "It is very strange!" he murmured, and indeed so it was, for had Fäik posed for it the likeness could not have been more complete. Those sparkling emerald eyes on the small banner looked as

<sup>1</sup> Mon Dieu.

<sup>2</sup> Pronounced Ah-hess.

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frankly and fearlessly at Pierrek as Fäik's own, the same mischievous smile lurked on the rosy lips of both. The short, decided, delicately-chiselled nose of the girl at his side was repeated in the portrait, and the diadem of gemmed stars rested not more royally on Ahès's rutilant locks than did the lace coiffe with its slender circlet of gold tissue on Fäik's wavy bandeaux.

Pierrek turned his troubled eyes upon Fäik with pained surprise; the coincidence, ridiculous as it seemed, hurt him keenly. His Fäik—and Ahès, the Lady of Ker-Ys, whose wanton graces had brought about the doom of that glorious city! Had he then married one of those fatal women in whose veins is supposed to linger some strain of the siren's blood? All the country-side knew and believed the ancient story that tells of the love of a bold *gars* of Finisterre for a surpassingly lovely creature caught one moonlit night in his nets, and borne in his arms to his little granite home. Of that unhallowed union, which every night brought them together again, until dawn forced the *Morgan* to disappear once more beneath the waves—for woman she could be during the hours of darkness only—a child was born, a baby girl, with hair like the dawn and eyes that held all the changing tints of the sea. Forgetful of her vows, the radiant young mother had failed thereafter to return to Ahès's watery domain, and death had been her punishment. The fisher-lad, crazed by a grief too great to bear, had—so the story went—thrown himself, holding all that remained of his beloved, from the topmost crag of the grim falaise that overhangs the *Infern* of *Gweledigez* (Hell of the Apparition), and the little child, baptized and cared for by a wandering disciple of St. Gwenolé, became the ancestress of a long line of strangely beautiful women, who always brought ill-fortune to the men they loved.



Pierrek shuddered, as swift as lightning as all this flashed upon his mind. Fäik's loveliness had always seemed to him scarcely human . . . was she then . . . ! He turned abruptly away, his heart aching curiously, but the next instant, filled with shame and remorse that even for a passing second he had been a traitor to his love, he drew close to her again. Fortunately, Fäik, poring over her pretty prize, had noticed nothing of all this. She was racking her brains to account for this mysterious resemblance between herself and the great and dread Ahès—a very real personage indeed to all coast-Bretons, and one very constantly in their minds.

The crowd upon the heath had by now thickened to a great concourse, and was forming into ranks, for the moment of the "procession" had arrived, and interminable trains of men and women holding huge white-and-gold tapers and waving banners aloft were moving towards the distant statue, chanting as they went the Hymn to St. Hervé. There was much confusion and jostling at first as the people sought to fall into step and walk in quadruple lines, and they made a sea of swaying, balancing, shifting color between the immovable gray masses of the stately menhirs that was extremely picturesque and dazzling. The beggars and cripples, momentarily forgotten in this huge mix-up, and afraid to be trampled upon, loudly lamented their inability to do the trampling themselves, vociferating a continual "*En hano Sant Hoärvé! . . . en hano Sant Hoärvé!*"<sup>1</sup> . . . spare us, spare us!" Their supplications, however, were utterly drowned in the heaven-filling clamor of thousands upon thousands singing to an ancient warlike tune:

<sup>1</sup> "In St. Hervé's name! . . . in St. Hervé's name!"

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*"N 'hen eus ket en Breiz, n'hen eus ket unan,  
N 'hen eus ket eur zani evel Sant Hoärvé,"*<sup>1</sup>

and nothing was left for them to do but to crawl or creep or hobble out of the way, according to the possibilities afforded by legs more or less *hors de combat*. In cold blood not one of those singing pilgrims would have voluntarily so much as brushed against the poor devils, for in Brittany eternal damnation is supposed to become the portion of whomsoever offends a beggar, but the furor of the moment, the haste to be among the first before the blessed statue, swept everything before it, even the mendicants' enormous swarms.

"Is there something wrong with you, Pierrek?" Fäik, who had vainly attempted to draw her husband into the line of pilgrims passing nearest to them, said at last, somewhat impatiently.

"Wrong? What do you mean?" he asked, pulling himself together for the second time, and extremely disgusted to find the task so difficult a one.

"You look so angry!" she ventured. "There's that nasty black cross above your eyes that I dislike so much to see! Have I vexed you, Pierrek?"

"Vexed me!" he exclaimed, with a singular eagerness. "You could never do that, Fäik-gez! Come, we'll join the procession; but first let's go and buy the biggest candles in the place!" He turned, and his eyes lighted on a group of men standing together a few yards away. They were all from Enez-Pers, also they were scowling in his direction, and at sight of them his own face turned livid with anger. Right in front of the band Klaoda, their leader, was defiantly standing, arms crossed in fine

<sup>1</sup> There is not in Brittany, there is not a single one,  
There is not a saint like St. Hervé!

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melodramatic style, head thrown back and eyes glittering evilly, quite unconscious, however, as was his small detachment, that immediately behind them fifteen or twenty stalwart fishermen from Kermarioker were noiselessly advancing. The fact of the matter was that Nédélék Houarn, warned by Fäik of the possibilities of the day, had been stalking Klaoda ever since his landing an hour before, and as by now the tail-end of the procession, followed by a writhing, disgustful, contortionate phalanx of beggars, was leaving the ground, the two opposing factions found themselves at last alone face to face and in an extraordinarily favorable position for doing battle!

With a precision that would have done honor to the snowy decks of a man-of-war, the lads of Kermarioker wheeled, and, to the extreme surprise and evident annoyance of those from Enez-Pers, took up their stand without word or gesture immediately behind Pierrek and Fäik. Klaoda gave an ugly laugh and squared his shoulders, and then for a moment which seemed interminable there was silence absolute and complete. Pierrek had said but one word, made but one gesture, but that sufficed to make Fäik take her stand obediently on the flat top of a great square stone near by. She was not in the least frightened now, nor even anxious, although she knew perfectly what was about to happen, and she glanced proudly at her Pierrek, who somehow looked bigger than ever, his face still ashen, and with a dull, steel-like gleam in his gray eyes. The terrible, slow-kindling anger of this quiet, unemotional lad was something impressive to behold; it was so essentially Breton, so different from the foaming, hysterical passion of more southern races.

Nobody could possibly have mistaken the affair for a

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chance encounter; the organization of both forces was conspicuously evident. There was a readiness in the attitude and demeanor of all concerned, too, that showed without any peradventure that they knew what they were about. Calmly, Pierrek and his men moved a few steps forward, then stopped, Klaoda doing likewise, with a most astonishing and deliberate scorn of haste and excitement. There was a gleam in all those eyes which surprised the little watcher on the rock, for it is not often the luck of women to see these combat lights—a gleam which made her suddenly thankful that sailors do not carry the murderous *pen-baz*.

Suddenly, with heads lowered like bulls in the arena, they charged down upon one another, and met with a volley of dull thuds. Breton encounters invariably begin by ramlike buttings, a very disabling custom indeed, and it is only after this first onslaught that fists come into play. Drawing off quickly, again the Kermarioker lads wheeled, but only to return with savage curses fighting like demons. Always holding together, they turned this way and that, bewildering the superior force from Enez-Pers with magnificently-aimed blows, and from her throne of stone Fäik, beside herself with enthusiasm, cried her encouragements to the one side and her contempt to the other—herself the most curious feature of the fray, with the wings of her coiffe and of her collarette flying in the wind, her cheeks on fire, and her fierce eyes flashing like twin stars. Once more Pierrek massed his men and crashed into the heart of the enemy. Nothing could stand before such a rush as that, and the men from Enez-Pers broke and streamed away, a scattered band of fugitives, pursued hot-foot by their victors and the biting taunts of Fäik.

“Oh! you whelps, you chicken-hearted whelps!” she

was screaming, quite unaware of what she said. "Kill them, Pierrek, kill them!" and with one final piercing cry she leaped from the boulder and flew after the battle like a little fury.

Was the thing finished . . .? Oh! not quite yet, for Klaoda, maddened with shame and rage, suddenly faced round, after vainly trying to rally his forces, and Pierrek, slightly in advance of his, clearing the intervening space with one mighty jump, closed with him, and, lifting him bodily, threw him headlong into the midst of his retreating comrades. He capped this *coup de maître* by following him into the confused and utterly disorganized bunch, using both feet and hands to such purpose and with such effect that in a moment the last of the *gars* of Enez-Pers were disappearing beyond the heather-grown crest of the ridge, a completely demoralized and severely punished crowd.

As Pierrek came back limping slightly, Fäik, who was brimming over with the joy of victory and fairly dancing in delight by the roadside, stopped suddenly and gazed speechlessly at him. His face startled her, it was so grave.

"Are you hurt?" she asked, sharply, stepping anxiously to his side.

"Not in the least. Some one trod on my foot; that's all."

"What is the matter, then?" she asked again, all her triumph laid in ashes.

"Oh! not much," he replied, glancing at his faithful adherents, who were hobblingly rejoining him, "excepting that, unless I am much mistaken, we have but just begun our task. These fellows will come over to Kermarioker one of these days with reinforcements, and"—he paused for a moment—"the feud is on in good earnest!" he concluded, rather lamely.

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It was an unusual scene, and one that would have done credit to the dramatic stage. The vast *lande*, with its dreamy setting of rose-hued heather and yellow broom a little paled by the approaching winter, the distant background of menhirs and dolmens, where the great multi-colored throng could just be seen rising and kneeling and rising again beneath the brilliant sunlight that blurred the little candle flames borne by its thousand hands to a mere powdering of faint-red gold, and there in the foreground the battle-scarred little party standing around the square granite block from the top of which Fäik had watched the combat—Pierrek and the *gars* in their dust-covered fête clothes, Nédélék Houarn nursing his left cheek where a well-directed fist had left an angry blue mark, and Fäik, with a new light in her eyes and a new anxiety in her heart, eagerly scanning her husband's face!

"There is no sort of need for this little affair to make us lose all our fun to-day," Nédélék said, suddenly waving his disengaged hand from side to side, fingers outspread, as though scattering his enemies, for the present, at least, to all four corners of heaven. "If we don't hurry, the Benediction will be over, and we won't see Monsieur le Recteur in his fine crimson and gold and blue!"

Pierrek, who had almost immediately recovered his equanimity, and was occupied in brushing the dust from his clothes, burst out laughing.

"He cannot be more crimson and blue than you are yourself, my poor Nédélék!" he said, looking at him over his shoulder. "Who was it gave you that fine souvenir?"

"How the devil do I know?" Nédélék growled. "There were enough arms and legs flying about in the air to furnish an army where I got that. Let's go now, anyway. What's the good of throwing out roots here?"

When after repairing the disorder of their holiday ac-

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coutrements they at last reached the neighborhood of the statue, luck was with them, for the Curé was still standing before the little temporary altar, in all the magnificence of a chasuble that saw the light of day only once a year—for St. Hervé's *Pardon*. In consequence, although several hundred years old, its crimson and golden roses, brocaded upon a sumptuous shade of softly-brilliant mazarine blue woven with slender threads of bullion, had retained nearly all their pristine beauty of coloring. The ivory-tinted lace of the surplice threw this gorgeous garment into superb relief, and thus draped and framed by the red-sail canopy and the blue masses of the nets, the tall figure of the priest looked extraordinarily imposing. Vanished for the time was the simple sailor-curé, with his brusquely tender ways, and in his place a very grand personage indeed faced the multitude, hands extended in benediction, head thrown slightly back, and upon the clean-cut features an expression of absolute saintliness seldom seen there, for it was almost haughty in its rapt concentration. It would have been difficult to describe wherein exactly this transformation lay—for the *mise-en-scène*, beautiful though it was, had but little to do with it, and yet it was patent that just then the Recteur of Kermarioker dwarfed everybody and everything around him into insignificance, scarcely excepting the noble statue towering like some splendid embodiment of power and eternity above the altar.

Slow-beating drums punctuated the final allocution, the distance at which they had been stationed enabling their muffled throbs to strike a perfect note in the harmony of the general scheme. When the last "Amen" had been uttered there was a moment of stupendous silence—such a hush as once in a very, very long while may fall upon an over-awed multitude, and through

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which thrills the united pulsation of countless hearts—the flutter of countless souls. Then, as though at a word of command, the whole kneeling assembly rose to its feet, and from thousands upon thousands of throats burst forth the “Hymn of St. Hervé,” rolling in waves of thunder along the abrupt cliff-edge to cascade, down, down, down where the sunlight lay in dazzling pools of gold upon the sands, glittered upon the pale azure of an almost glassy sea, and bathed the serried ranks of stranded *chaloupes* and *sinagots*, lying dry-keeled, inclined upon their broad sides, awaiting the evening tide to refloat them at the hour of departure.

The Recteur alone still knelt before the altar, while behind him St. Hervé’s especial procession of votaries and penitents slowly formed. In front, immediately following the banner of honor borne by two stalwart fishermen—a huge oriflamme of royal blue, thickly sewn with golden roses and silver lilies encircling an exquisitely-embroidered figure of the Saint—came “the mothers.” In their arms little ailing children were carried, and as they passed the statue these were lifted aloft to touch the stone feet, or at least the edge of the granite lace that borders the great mantle draping the magnificent figure. Behind those impassioned, imploring, fever-eyed women another and, if possible, yet more touching group slowly advanced—the sailors rescued by the mercy of St. Hervé from death by drowning!

With the long, loose, balancing stride of those who spend their lives upon tossing decks they approached, wearing the very clothes in which they had battled with the waves, and dripping, as then, with salt-water, for a few moments before they had plunged themselves anew in order to appear before the Compassionate Saint “just as when he took them by the hand and drew them from



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the deep!" Their torn jerseys hanging open, their coarse canvas trousers rolled up from their bare feet, their grim faces set like flint by the effort to live again in all its horror the moment that preceded "their Hoärvé's" supreme interference in their behalf, they passed; head erect "at attention," tragic beyond compare, for they knew that it was not for the last time that the clutching sea would hold them in her cold embrace. "She never forgives our once escaping her!" they themselves say, "and then—!"

Behind them, and in cruel contrast, trailed on wearied, discouraged feet a double file of recently-made widows, their bowed heads hidden beneath the drooping hoods of their long mourning cloaks. What did these come to demand of Kermarioker's august *Patron*—what supplication did there remain for them to utter? Alas, their presence there could only be akin to some supreme protestation, some mute reproach to the great Saint who had not in time looked their way, for life was indeed finished for them, as was testified by the extinguished tapers they carried reversed, since in Finisterre second marriages are a rarity, looked upon especially in the case of these "widows of the sea" as a positive sacrilege!

Others followed, and others still—men and women clad with a richness of costume that seemed to belie the proverbial poverty of Brittany, or wretched creatures in rags and patches, outcasts and fugitives, cripples, blind, halting, malformed, and misbegotten, but all lifted momentarily out of their cruel misery by hope, transfigured by faith—and, yes, rid for an instant of their repulsiveness, so great was the victory of mind over poor, tortured matter. One by one they bowed before the statue—not in adoration, as the misinformed persist in believing—but in reverence, gratitude, or supplication for heavenly

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mediation, and a strange phalanx they looked, kneeling and rising on the now utterly flattened and blackened carpet of heather, a woman scintillating in gold and silver embroideries toeing the line beside a bundle of tatters, a wealthy *mareyeur*<sup>1</sup> rubbing elbows with an aged *baleer-bro*<sup>2</sup> drawing himself along on two sticks—all the types of almost every class in the broad land of Armór, and to the very last one seeking the protection of *Sant Hoärvé*."

Pierrek and Fäik, too, had made their obeisance to the Saint, deeply, profoundly, with all their hearts in their eyes, and now, little fingers linked as usual, they were returning towards the *camp du Pardon*. On their way thither they had yet one station to make, the miraculous fountain that, hollowed from a gigantic granite block, looks like a stone-framed silver mirror. Around it are stepping-stones and an encircling foot-path, trodden deep by the feet of generations. Reverently the young couple drank a wooden bowlful apiece of the clear cool water, handed to them by the attending crones, who received with low courtesys, as old-fashioned and obsolete as themselves, the *pièce-blanche* of fifty centimes that Pierrek handed each of them in lieu of the tiny copper coin that constitutes the usual offering.

That evening as the sun was setting in a sky of pale apple green slashed with gold, they went the round of the *camp*. They were a little tired, and surfeited with emotions, sensations, and pleasures, but still they wanted before leaving to see all there was yet to see; and it was a scene even gayer than it had been by broad daylight that met their enraptured eyes, a scene very different also from the splendid pathos of the morning's religious

<sup>1</sup> Buyer of fish. Middle-man between the fishers and the marketmen.

<sup>2</sup> Seeker of bread.

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ceremonies. Tents of various shapes and hues displayed rows of already-lighted paper lanterns; there were merry-go-rounds, with accompaniment of barrel-organs maddeningly braying and wheezing monotonous popular airs, which almost succeeded in drowning the shrilling lament of the *bignious* where the dancing of decorous *rondes* was going on, and here and there *guerz*<sup>1</sup>-singers, all festooned with their coarsely-printed stock in trade, held attentive audiences with their interminably-chanted histories of Breton Saints and heroes. Farther on a great square was roped in for the wrestling-matches, and in the adjoining enclosure remarkable feats of strength were being performed with enormous mallets and weighty beams of oak.

Laughing and chatting they wandered about, taking in the *coup d'œil*, revisiting this and that amusement of the morning, or making new discoveries, when at length they came upon a curious bower made of fagots, sheltering a fortune-teller of the good old witch type, a real, bona-fide, simon-pure hag, apparently of incalculable age—toothless, and half bald, like an iniquitous vulture, her black coiffe all awry, her talon-shaped claws stroking the huge, blinking gray owl that perched upon her pointed knee—a veritable Gagaoula of the North!

"Tell you your fortunes, my sweet doves!" she croaked as they approached.

"No! No!" Pierrek remonstrated, holding back his eager little bride. "It is wicked to tempt Providence. I won't have it!" But, wilful as ever, Fäik slipped from him and held out her rosy fingers with a mischievous toss of the head.

"She can't tell the future; it's all a joke!" she laughed,

<sup>1</sup> Ballad-singers.

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gleefully, making a funny grimace at her dismayed lover.

By the gleam of her smoky torch the old horror was bending now over the small, warm palm, cabalistic words falling from her sinister mouth . . . a regular hocus-pocus repeated a hundred times since morning—but all at once the crooked back straightened with a jerk, and she flung the hand roughly aside.

“Get out of here!” she cried, in a shrill, frightened voice, blinking her little red eyes excitedly—“get out of here! I won’t have anything to do with such as you!”

With a gasp of dismay Fäik fell back, chalk white and trembling.

“You hag, you *serc’h*,<sup>1</sup> *riblerez*,<sup>2</sup> *loudouren*!”<sup>3</sup> growled Pierrek, striding forward and clutching hold of the fortune-teller, while the owl, with hoarse shrieks, fluttered clumsily into the darkness of the hut. “Talk like that to my wife—you cursed skulking bird of evil! I’ll teach you! I’ll twist that scraggy neck of yours!” He was shaking her as a terrier shakes a rat, and scattering things off her in a bewildering whirl—dried knuckle-bones that described circles in the air, odd bits of glass, ribbon-like snake-skins.

“Drop her, Pierrek!” Fäik implored, with tears of fright raining down her white face; “she’s crazy! She’s sure to cast a spell on us! Drop her; oh! do, do, please do!”

Pierrek, at the sound of that distressed voice, literally threw the witch on the ground at Fäik’s feet. “Here, beg her pardon,” he said, hoarse with rage, “or I’ll crush you with my foot like the evil beast you are!” But Fäik had had enough, and putting her hands to her head she fled, crying between her dry, nervous sobs:

<sup>1</sup> She-monkey.

<sup>2</sup> Evil-lived one.

<sup>3</sup> Filthy woman.

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"Come, Pierrek, come; I'm afraid, I'm afraid!"

The old hag rose slowly to her feet as he obeyed the call, and looked confusedly about as if dazed by that terrible shaking.

Twice she turned completely around like a pivot, and then, bursting into a succession of cracked peals of laughter, she extended one arm in the direction where the young couple had vanished.

"*Ar rê zaonet!*"<sup>1</sup> she shrieked, in a voice of incredible hatred and disgust.

<sup>1</sup> "The accursed," or "those who will be damned."

## CHAPTER XIV

"Reach the man through the woman," proverbs say,  
But if the woman is to be beguiled,  
And she a mother, then the shortest way  
To mind or heart is always through her child.

M. M.

FÄIK, sitting on an overturned *kindu*, was industriously knitting while watching her first-born play in the sand at her feet. In the hollow of her lap was cradled the new arrival, now three months old, who already gave promise to become as perfect a specimen of handsome babyhood as his little brother.

The little bride of four years ago had scarcely changed; the pure oval of the face had perchance lengthened a little, the wilful mouth softened a trifle, and the emerald eyes acquired greater depth of expression; but the exquisite complexion was unaltered, the little mutinous curls above the brow every bit as unruly, and the slender figure just as supple and graceful as ever.

The tide was ebbing fast, the April air as mellow as June in other climes, and the morning sun shone gayly upon the million mica paillettes of the gray Kermario cliffs and the greenish-blue depths that lapped their bases with scarce a ripple. Beyond the bar of low rocks that for half a mile or so projects from the foot of the northern peak, a white sail could be distinguished driving along at a great rate of speed, and before Fäik could well have had time to recognize the boat—the steersman

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was invisible by reason of the intervening sail—the little craft came rushing onto the sands, and with shivering canvas stood motionless. Kicking off his tall rubber boots, the Recteur of Kermarioker swung himself over the side, and with a sound of splashy footsteps walked rapidly up the beach, his *soutane* hanging limply about his tall form, one sleeve completely drenched, and on his head a serviceable sou'wester, instead of the ordinary broad-leaved clerical covering.

Little Arzel<sup>1</sup> looked up from his sand-castles with a wondrous pair of eyes, emerald-hued like his mother's, and was instantly snatched up and perched upon the priest's broad shoulder, his dimpled fingers clutching for support at the Roman collar and silken *rabat*, in spite of Fäik's remonstrances.

"Let him do as he pleases," the Curé said, with a delighted smile; "my godson can do no wrong," and then added, in a graver way, as he sat down beside her and settled the little boy on his knee, "I am glad to find you, for I stopped here on my way home expressly to talk with you."

"That is very kind of you, Monsieur le Recteur!" Fäik exclaimed, brightly, settling herself with one foot under her for greater comfort, but without interrupting the click of her needles. She looked exceedingly, almost preposterously, young like that, in spite of her two babies and her assiduous attention to the work in hand.

"It is," M. Kornog said, abruptly, "really difficult to realize that you are the mother of those two bouncing youngsters."

"I know," she replied, merrily. "Pierrek always tells me that I should be ashamed of myself to be still so

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Ar-zéll.

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childish, but that's stupid of him, because what is he himself, pray, at nearly twenty-four, but a mere boy? I dare say we do make a rather ridiculous couple!"

The breeze was blowing the little rings of copper-hued hair back against her coiffe, and she stopped knitting for the fraction of a second in order to smooth them down.

"Oh! that's not going to make you look the least more matronly!" M. Kornog remarked, dryly, looking at her out of the corner of his eye. "You are still, and I fear, alas, will remain, the little dare-devil who urged on our *gars* against those from Enez-Pers four years ago; who—"

"I didn't urge them on, Monsieur le Recteur!" she interrupted, flinging one knee independently over the other, and endangering thereby the equilibrium of the sleeping child on her lap.

"There now! What did I tell you? *Sapristi*, it is not a wooden doll you are jouncing about like that! Take care!" the Recteur remonstrated, with some impatience.

Fäik looked curiously at him from beneath her black lashes.

"What ails you, Monsieur le Recteur?" she asked, quite seriously. "Has something gone amiss that you should be so cross?"

M. Kornog lifted his shoulders with an inexpressible gesture of tolerance. Fäik had been his particular *enfant gatée* ever since her arrival at Kermarioker, and her *boutades* always amused him, but to conceal his feelings, whatever they were at the moment, was not one of his accomplishments, and he continued, rather gruffly:

"I think, Fäik, that the time has come for us to stop this endless war kindled by your marriage. It is dirty work, unworthy of true Bretons, who should fight for



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their country alone. We hold human life cheaper here than does all the rest of the world, but that does not entitle us to waste it wantonly!"

Fäik displayed no surprise, no resentment at the forcefulness of the speech. In the main she agreed with her old friend, but still there was a certain pride in the manner of her listening; it is not everybody who can boast of being the cause of such a feud, and she would not have been a woman and a beauty had she failed to be conscious of this.

M. Kornog glanced at her and then turned away, in his quick, jerky fashion. His face had suddenly hardened, and without quite knowing why he put little Arzel down again among his sand-castles, where he was soon laughing and crowing with delight at the antics of a dozen sand-spiders jumping backward and forward over fortifications that crumbled at a mere touch of their many lace like legs.

"You must stop it, Fäik!" the Recteur said, sternly. "You alone can do this by speaking to Klaoda, the ring-leader and instigator of all these outrages. It is a thing to be done by you and at once!"

Clutching her baby with one arm, and letting her knitting roll to the ground, she sprang to her feet.

"I implore the mercy of Klaoda! Never, Monsieur le Recteur—never! Don't count on that, because not even for you—no, not for Pierrek and the little ones—will I humble myself so!"

She waved her disengaged arm fiercely towards the slender line of deeper blue just visible above the blue of the sea, towards "Enez-Pers the Wicked," as Kermarioker had now learned to call it. "Oh! let them come again and again, let them attack our boats at sea, and ambush us from behind the rocks of our own beach,

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we'll know how to meet them in fair or foul fight, as we have so often done, and beat them, too . . . but cry for quarter . . . no, Monsieur le Recteur, a thousand times no!"

The priest, too, had risen, his tall black form towering grimly above the angry girl.

"Name of a dog!" he cried, angrily. "Is there no sobering you, Fäik Rouzik, nothing that will show you where this obstinacy of yours is leading your adopted village? I saw the *Vicaire* of Kastel-ar-Veur this morning at the semaphore, where he had landed but a moment before, and he told me that your uncle Karádek and your old friend the Recteur are heartbroken over this continued battling. They have both vainly tried to put it down, but your uncle is helpless against Klaoda's ever-rising popularity, for they cannot forgive him what they call his connivance in your marriage, and as to the poor Recteur, he is nearly ninety now, and unequal to the task! Are you, then, going to stand coldly by and let things go on?"

"I am your humble servant, Monsieur le Recteur," Fäik said, slowly, with that species of humility that is but an aggravated form of pride, and very untruthfully as well, for she was nobody's servant at all, especially under compulsion. "I am your humble servant—in all else; but what you ask I cannot do!"

The Curé bit his underlip to restrain a too violent retort. He had suddenly remembered that force and authority were foolish weapons to use with such a nature—coaxing might be more successful, but, alas, coaxing was not in his line at all. "Ah! these women of Brit-tany!" he thought, bitterly, "they are more obstinate and troublesome to lead than the men!" But aloud he resumed in an altogether different tone, though it greatly exasperated him to descend to such methods:

"Fäik . . . do you never think of your children? Are they to grow up with this enmity for an inheritance? One of these days Pierrek may be killed—indeed, it's a wonder that this should not have happened long ago, for it's he they want to bag . . . and had he not borne a charmed life . . . !" He glanced at the swiftly-paling face before him, and continued with renewed hope and energy. "Something else the *Vicaire* told me, and that is that Koäder Le-Hurec is coming to visit your uncle next week. I know you don't like her, but still why not see her? . . . here at Kermarioker, of course," he exclaimed, hurriedly, alarmed by a gesture of Fäik, "here in your own place, and see whether she cannot influence Klaoda—it is the only alternative, and it just now occurred to me when I saw how abhorrent it would be to you to speak to him yourself! Please, my good little Fäik, do this, for your poor mother-in-law, who is eating her heart out with anxiety; for your Pierrek, whose life is not worth a sou's purchase; for your innocent little children, and lastly for me, your old friend!"

His good little Fäik was facing him with a high head and an aching heart—the two often go together *chez nous la-bàs!*

"Koäder will certainly be the very person to pacify Enez-Pers!" she said, with a little sneer that made the Recteur gasp. "She who has the evil eye!"

"What!" the amazed priest almost shouted, "the evil eye! . . . Are you mad, Fäik, to talk such nonsense? . . . the evil eye indeed! Why, her husband has had incredible luck, as you very well know, and that from the day he married her—at least, so I have been told!"

"That is as it may be!" Fäik replied, utterly unshaken. "She has the dirigible evil eye; that's all it proves!"

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"The dirigible evil eye! And what in St. Gildas's name is that, if I may be permitted to inquire?"

"The power of bringing ill luck to those one hates!" she curtly informed him.

"Oh, indeed! I'm glad to know it; one's never too old to learn, and I'm not above seeking enlightenment!"

Fäik winced. "There I go!" poor M. Kornog swiftly reflected, "always too hasty in my sayings. I'll have to begin all over again!"

"Personally," he remarked, as quietly as he could, "I do not fear those islanders of yours, as you know. I am, alas! far from being the meek and lowly person a priest should be. I am a fighter, of a fighting stock, and have often yearned to pitch into them myself!—What am I saying?" he chided inwardly, but the sudden glow on the pretty face at his side urged him to persevere with what was after all but the exact truth. "But in such a fight it is the women and children who suffer . . . the old mothers and the tiny children." He glanced meaningly at the curly pate of little Arzel bending over a line of pebble forts that he had just terminated to his entire satisfaction.

"The tiny little children!" he repeated, with convincing emphasis.

Something vibrated in Fäik's heart responding to this last touch—a clever one, decidedly—for the girl was a tender mother, despite her youth and her headlong, impulsive ways. With such as she Brittany is abundantly provided, thank the Saints!

"I will not promise anything," she said, still a little defiantly, "but Monsieur le Recteur, I will think over what you have said and let you know . . . what . . . what I can bring myself to do."

This was an immense concession, and the shrewd Rec-

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teur had the wisdom to let the matter drop without further comment, budding resolves being best left to unclose in their own good time. Indeed, he did not seem to be listening very intently. He was watching Arzel, his head slightly inclined on one side, his eyes lost in pleasant contemplation.

"I had forgotten," he said, after an almost imperceptible pause, "that I have a surprise at home for my godson!"

At the word "surprise" the boy rose and stood before the priest, shoulders squared, head erect, eyes unblinking—an absurd reproduction of his father in miniature.

"What is it, venerable godfather?" he lisped, with extraordinary gravity. "What is the surprise?"

This was a strangely delicious little being, with hair of yellow silk like that one sees on the heads of very expensive wax-dolls, falling straight across the brow, and waving about the shoulders, light as thistle-down. The complexion was that of a tea-rose slightly underlaid with pink, the nose ever so delicately aquiline, and the chin obstinately formed, with a most kissable dimple punctuating its resolute roundness, but the greatest seduction of that baby countenance lay in the deep-set, wide-open eyes, very large, and veiled by ridiculously long lashes—eyes that looked with almost ludicrous intentness upon all the things of this world. In his eagerness he laid two chubby hands violently on the skirt of the long, black *soutane*, and looked up questioningly in the Curé's now brilliantly smiling face.

"Well, Little Curiosity," he answered, tenderly patting the yellow head, "it is a pair of magpies who talk better than you do, even; great, big, full-grown magpies, very arrogant and proud of their fine black-and-white coats!"

"For Arzel?" the little fellow asked, in delighted won-

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der. "What's their name? . . . tell me, venerable godfather—quick!"

"Not very pretty names, Arzel-gez. Perhaps you'll want to baptize them over again!"

"No—oh no!"

"Yes—oh yes! doubtless! for they're not in the very least nice. The gentleman magpie is called Gouillas,<sup>1</sup> and the lady magpie Souillotte.<sup>1</sup> Now what do you say to that, my three-year-old philosopher?"

A gurgling laugh was the answer. Gouillas and Souillotte, that was very funny indeed. Nobody in the world but a venerable godfather like Arzel's could have invented such funny names, and promised so joyful a surprise!

"Come with your *Mammik* this afternoon to the presbytery, and Mari-Gwezek will give them to you. They have a nice, large, willow cage to live in, but they're never inside; they prefer, you see, to be independent, and to strut up and down on the grass, wagging their tails and looking impertinently at everybody. You can feed them with a spoon, Arzel, cabbage soup and buckwheat mush—just what you eat yourself. But now I must go home quick, or I'll be scolded. This good Mari-Gwezek, unlike some, does not improve with age, and if she does not get the lobsters from the semaphore in time to boil them for mid-day dinner, she'll shriek louder than the magpies. Just think, Arzel, I took four blue *langoustes* from one *casier* and five green lobsters from another. Trot over to the boat with me, and I'll give you one of each sort for papa's dinner."

Comical were the efforts of the embryo fisherman to reduce the two huge armored scramblers to anything like

<sup>1</sup> In rough English rendering, "Messy" and "Dirty."

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portability. The lobster's claws had been strongly tied with string to his gleaming body, and since *langoustes* are by nature devoid of these commodious adjuncts, the feat would have been merely one of strength for two very young and inexperienced arms, but alack! these "cardinals of the sea," as a very great French writer who must have been a very ignorant fisherman once mis-called them, flapped enormous tails in such near proximity to Arzel's aristocratic little nose, that in three bounds Fäik cleared the distance, and capturing child and crustaceans by main force, without for all that relinquishing her firm hold on baby Tamek, ran laughing up the beach, turning once or twice to wave an affectionate good-bye to the departing Recteur.

It was only when her children were sunk in their sweet afternoon slumber that the young mother could find time to sit down quietly and think over the morning's conversation. The sun, really rather over-vigorous for April, did not intrude itself too importunately into her little garden at the back of the house, and there the air was quite exquisitely cool and caressing. From her seat on the inner door-step Fäik could hear the first turn of her two darlings in their cradles, and meanwhile, when glancing up from her eternal knitting, enjoy the sight of the great border of white violets surrounding a promising square of newly planted salads, and satisfy herself that the radishes would not be unwholesomely overshadowed later on by the tall spikes of the hollyhocks with which she had insisted upon flanking them. The two latest inmates of the garden, Gouillas and Souillotte, stood off suspiciously from her clicking needles, midway between the invitingly open gate of their rustic cage and the tips of her light sabots. Their insolent black eyes were questioningly fixed upon her every now and again, their

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sleek heads cocked on one side, visibly taking stock of this new mistress, so much more pleasant to gaze upon than cross old Mari-Gwezek. Arzel had cried very bitterly because neither of these piebald birds had consented to accompany him to his couch, but all was soothingly still now, and Fäik sank into a profound reverie—a most unusual thing with her.

Should she follow the Recteur's advice, and putting her pride in her pocket consent at least to receive the redoubtable Koäder? The casualties in the ranks of the Kermarioker, as well as in those of the Enez-Pers faction, had been numerous lately. Not one year had passed since her marriage without some bloody battle being fought to a finish, and this was without prejudice to the many skirmishes that had been productive of much damage, more or less serious in immediate and remote effect.

"What shall I do? What shall I do?" she said, half aloud in her perplexity.

"Say your prayers, say your prayers, say your prayers," a preternaturally solemn voice pronounced distinctly at the edge of her skirt, and straightening herself with a start of fear, she saw Gouillas perched on one leg, wagging his head up and down to emphasize this timely piece of advice, as though really understanding its import!

For a moment Fäik stared vacantly at this impudent counsellor; the stare was moreover mutual, and so knowing and piercing were the beady black eyes fixed upon her own that she mechanically crossed herself. Gouillas brought his head to a yet more convenient angle, and clearing his throat, remarked, impressively: "*Dominus vobiscum!*" Surely the heart beating beneath those shining black-and-white feathers, and the brain under the



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jaunty cap-like plumes, must be human after all! Who could say what echoes of a bygone life, what shadows of a former existence flitted through that fallow mind? Or was this mocker merely imitating his latest instructress, the prayerful, if at times profane, Mari-Gwezek? Lower and lower Fäik's head was bent above the motionless magpie, and suddenly she laughed a short little laugh that would have been harsh had not her voice been so very sweet.

## CHAPTER XV

There ne'er was mail so densely wove no thrust would carry  
through,  
There never was a weir but what some flood could twist in two,  
There never was a foot inapt to wend in Folly's ways,  
And if yours has not travelled far, give God the greater praise!  
M. M.

FÄIK was not a sentimental nor a particularly emotional girl; her merry heart was always bubbling over with infectious joyousness, excepting when smitten by sudden gusts of anger, and she was certainly not given to brooding, but when she thought of Koäder<sup>1</sup> Le Hurec as a visitor to her happy little home, an unaccustomed hopelessness—a sort of unacknowledged dread—made her feel cold all over. “I must get used to the idea,” this determined little spirit argued with herself. “I’ve promised Monsieur le Recteur to let her come for a week, and so there’s an end of it; besides, she may have changed for the better during the seven years I did not see her . . . and she can’t eat us up, anyhow!”

As a matter of fact, Koäder Le Hurec, though not an ogress, was none the less a very unpleasant guest to have to look forward to, and far from having been improved by time, she had even soured somewhat instead of mellowing. She was only thirty-three, it is true, but that to a girl of Fäik’s temperament seemed staidest middle age, which did not improve the prospect of their becoming at

<sup>1</sup> Pronounced Kó-a-dare.

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all intimate, since she would have to be treated with all the respect due to such a superiority of years. One is strict about such details in Finisterre!

Koäder was a Karádek by birth, and seemed to consider that in so being she had placed the length and breadth of Enez-Pers, not to say all Brittany, under an obligation. She acted at any rate, exactly as though everybody were bound in return for the honor she conferred upon them by her presence, to treat her with an uncommon deference, not untinged with considerable admiration. Her comfortable little home at Avranches, in Normandy, she fondly imagined to be the very acme of luxury and *bon-ton*, and her husband the most promising non-commissioned officer of the whole corps of *douaniers*—a *corps d'élite*, as she was always careful to add. This personage, if the truth must be told, was a rather dull, good-looking, simple-minded man, horribly henpecked, and relying wholly upon his wife's cleverness and money for all further advancement; for Koäder, or, rather, Madame Le Hurec, as she preferred to be called—Le Hurec, in two words, smacked of the aristocracy—was very well off in her own right—that is, for the wife of a non-com.—and was quite undoubtedly clever in her way.

In coming to visit the Rouziks this good lady was keenly alive to the fact that Fäik required a good and abiding example of perfectly well-bred womanhood, and hers was also the proud knowledge that none could be better fitted than Madame Le Hurec to offer it. Well ballasted, therefore, with lofty tolerance and good advice she set upon her way.

The day upon which she arrived from Enez-Pers was cloudy, with occasional spurts of rain and slashes of pale sunshine—a sort of weather that spring is occasionally addicted to. A brisk sou'west wind was blowing, the

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green waters of the bay were flecked with whitecaps, and the twin peaks blinked through a transparent scarf of gray mist at the vague and vaporous horizon line.

As the boat that was bearing her and her pompous luggage rounded the jetty point, a succession of boisterous squalls were alternately shepherding gleams of tossing sunshine and bursts of driving rain, and with alarming cries a flight of large gulls, unsuccessfully tacking against the wind, were swept shoreward like missiles sped by some redoubtable sprite hidden within certain green-bellied storm-clouds that were rolling up from the offing. It seemed as though Pierrek's old friends were somehow bound to thrust a claw into whatever events particularly concerned him.

Lanäik and Fäik waited to meet the traveller at the landing-place, both in a very silent, uncomfortable state of mind, both utterly convinced beforehand that Koäder's visit would be far from beneficial in its effect upon the course of future events.

"Nevertheless, my daughter," Lanäik said, hurriedly, as the majestic form of Madame Le Hurec began to grow distinguishable through the aigrettes of spray spurting upward from the cleaving keel—"nevertheless, since Monsieur le Recteur and your good uncle Karádek deem it best, we must submit to this vexation. . . . They know what they want!"

Fäik tossed her head in a manner that was not in the least submissive. Had it been possible she would even now have taken back her word, and sent Koäder packing, so abhorrent had the prospect become to her; but it was too late, and with a face by no means welcoming, she turned to the slippery steps towards the foot of which the boat was just drawing in.

Assisted by a fierce-faced fisherman from Enez-Pers,

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who did not even deign to glance in the direction of the two waiting women, Madame Le Hurec gracefully disembarked. Her finely-shaped hands held a decorous-looking brown basket of the valise variety, and there was something that was forced and artificial, though by no means awkward, in the very fashion of her slow ascent to the top of the stairs. Hers was without question a beautiful face, pale and very cold, with rather too thin level lips and close-set eyes of a peculiarly lustreless shade of jetty black. Her thick dark hair was slightly waved beneath an exquisitely embroidered coiffe, her dress was made of the most costly material compatible with the exigencies of the costume of her island—which with a last glimmering of good sense she had steadily refused to discard—and the silk and paillette work upon her corsage was absolutely beyond praise in its marvellous wealth of design and execution. In spite of the buffets of the wind she endeavored to maintain that dignity which she felt would offer so beneficial an example to Fäik, but she was, nevertheless, a little breathless when she reached the top, which somewhat curtailed the ceremonious sentences she had prepared for this auspicious moment.

The walk home was uneventful, if far from agreeable, and the sun had decidedly conquered the clouds for the time being when Fäik stepped back courteously to let her imposing guest enter the house. It was that lady's happy lot to consider herself the centre of any situation, the pivot upon which any possible event must turn, and at present the bona-fide mission with which she had been intrusted by the *Conan* of her *c'hlan* and the venerable Recteur of Enez-Pers filled her with an extra importance which, like the oil poured upon Aaron, spread even unto the skirts of her garment. She bowed graciously to

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Lanäik, with a grand wave of the hand towards the hospitably open door. "She could not consent," she explained, "to precede the mother of her first cousin!" and overawed, *nolens volens*, by her superb manner, Lanäik passed in first. The room prepared for her at the back of the house met with her approval, for it seemed evident that the young couple had taken pains with it—Pierrek, indeed, having scrubbed it energetically the day before, "to show," as he remarked, laughingly, "that finic how one understood housekeeping in Kermarioker"—and immediately selecting the most comfortable chair, she sat down with folded hands to listen to Lanäik's polite offers of immediate refreshment.

Fäik was conspicuously silent, grudgingly presented her children, who, like herself, did not seem to take kindly to the stranger, and presently slipped away with them into the front garden, whence a good view was obtainable of the path her husband followed every night when coming from the harbor.

Pierrek appeared somewhat before his usual hour, and as he climbed the irregular steps cut in the solid rock he waved a gay greeting to Fäik.

"Has she arrived?" he asked, meeting her at the little gate, and lifting Arzel up to kiss him.

"Yes," she replied, slowly, "and she's . . . oh! she's worse than ever, so contemptuous and grand! B-r-r-r . . . r-r-r . . . I hate her!"

Pierrek laughed. "I'll not let her annoy you, Fäik-gez," he said, cheerfully, "her grand airs won't worry me much!" and seating herself on the low wall beside her he swung his basket round and opened it for her inspection. The water was oozing drop by drop from the sea-weed covering the freshly-caught fish within, and soon formed a little pool on the rocky path, beside

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which Arzel instantly sat down to dip his dimpled fingers.

The two lovers—for lovers they were still, and perhaps more than ever—were utterly absorbed in the customary exchange of the day's unimportant bits of news, when the visitor, followed by Lanäik, came out to join them, a tall, severe form in her fine clothes. She stood for a minute or two in silence, looking at them from a distance, and Gouillas, always more forward than his mate in giving his opinion, hopped gravely to the edge of a shell-bordered bed of pansies wherein he had been disporting himself, and shaking his plumes into sleeker shape, said amiably: "*Déomp da baléa!*"<sup>1</sup>

For once in her stately life Koäder Le Hurec was guilty of thoroughly undignified behavior, for, not having as yet become acquainted with the irrepressible Gouillas, she jumped clear into the opposite flower-bed, which happened to be full of tender young geraniums not yet in bud. Pierrek, who had turned at the noise, was doubled up with silent laughter, and nearly choked in his efforts to control himself sufficiently to go through the ceremony of presentation—a circumstance which fortunately Koäder did not notice, being fully occupied in extricating herself from the ruin of the geraniums. As for Lanäik, she fled back into the house, wiping tears of delight from her eyes. Fäik alone remained perfectly serious, for that usually fun-loving little person when once put out of sorts was not to be brought around by trifles.

"You must forgive me," Madame Le Hurec said, advancing at last draped in such shreds of her impressiveness as had survived so great a contretemps; "my nerves are high-strung, and I am not always mistress of them!"

<sup>1</sup> Let's go for a walk.

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A peasant born and bred talking of her nerves was something so extravagant that Pierrek stared at her open-mouthed, but even this slightly imbecile expression of surprise could not prevent him from being the strikingly handsome man he was, and Koäder, turning her black eyes upon him for the first time, decided that she had never seen any that could bear comparison with him.

Pierrek himself, recovering his manners, which, like those of most sailors, were excellent, looked at his new relative with his usual frank directness, and instantly realized that he detested her! It came to him like a flash of lightning, that left all his good resolutions for making the best of her visit shattered to exceedingly small splinters, and instead of going forward to shake her by the hand, he contented himself with muttering a mere conventional form of welcome, which caused the amazed Fäik to turn round and look at him questioningly.

Begun like this, Madame Le Hurec's stay at Kermarioker could not be expected to be a period of unmixed bliss, and yet, thanks to Koäder herself, things went almost easily at first. Indeed, her bitterest enemy must have been forced just then to describe this acrid, utterly selfish and heartless woman as well meaning. Her affability and apparent good-nature were something stupefying, and had her husband been present he would have refused to believe the testimony of his own eyes!

She did not, however, do all this with the ease of long practice, although with the assurance of one accustomed to be always in the right, which to a casual observer would have amounted pretty much to the same thing. She beamed benignantly upon Arzel when that young hopeful behaved in his most aggravating manner, closed her delicate ears to baby Tamek's occasional lamentings (for



though a reasonable infant enough, at four months old one has not as yet abjured all untimely manifestations of thirst or juvenile anger), and once or twice she positively verged on the affectionate with Fäik herself, without, however, succeeding in hoodwinking that quick-witted young woman for a single instant.

The secret of so great a change in Madame Le Hurec's entire plan of campaign was an open one to Fäik, but she was far too proud to let any one, least of all Pierrek, find it out from her; and while keeping as much out of the way of her guest as she could, when with her she betrayed no special animosity, merely contenting herself with holding her at arm's-length in a fashion and with a tact that might have done honor to the most expert woman of the world, and which in this little fisherman's wife was nothing less than astounding.

This secret—not indeed a very creditable one—was that Koäder Le Hurec, invulnerable until then within the triple armor of absolute egotism, boundless vanity, and intense self-love, was in the way of developing for her cousin's husband one of those passions that stride over every barrier to their object, ignore duty and all its hampering chains, and trample down all foresight, common-sense, and prudence. This gave her strength outwardly to conquer for the present her mad jealousy of Fäik, and her distaste for the quiet and humble life of the little household on the cliff. Also, in her opinion, it conferred upon her inalienably the right to ruin and debase her rival if occasion presented. Her hopes, indeed, were of the kind of which one does not willingly speak, so unusually regardless were they of all other interests concerned. Love—or what one has agreed to call by that name—works extraordinary ravages in such natures as Koäder's, and it really is a thousand pities that this par-

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ticular type of woman should not have her—affections—under a more effective control.

Pierrek naturally was completely ignorant of her unsavory state of mind. He was conscious merely of her constant observation of him, but this seemed to him to have a hostile motive, and it irritated him abominably, although with true Breton self-control he gave this irritation no vent whatsoever excepting when alone with his wife. He was a big innocent boy still, this father of two bouncing babies, and never would he have for a second imagined a woman to be quite so vile as Koäder would have appeared to him had he known her true feelings.

"You are really a model husband!" the latter said to him once when she found him building up the turf fire to spare Fäik the trouble—she had been looking a little pale, and he felt, as he told himself, quite unreasonably anxious.

He colored under his tan, and said, bluntly:

"It is easy to be a good husband when one has married a woman like Fäik!"

Koäder felt her abhorrence for Fäik take unto itself many additional yards of growth, but with a skill and a patience a less clever woman would have lacked, she refrained from pursuing the subject, and once more managed not to betray herself. In spite of her frequent statements, she was a woman of strong nerves, and could control herself admirably when it suited her book to do so. But from that morning the destruction of Fäik's happiness became a fixed idea, almost independent of her passion for Pierrek, which, strangely enough, was still perfectly chaste in thought. Like the little girl of nursery rhyme fame, when Bretonnes are good they are "very, very good," and when they are bad they are just as capable as others of being "horrid," but there is in

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their make-up an inborn and inbred chastity which it is difficult to uproot, and therefore, so far, her keenest desire was to detach the husband from the wife.

The week had been extended to two, and still not a word of the feud had been pronounced, nor was Koäder staying on by special invitation. She held the place, that was all, and although sorely tempted to give her a direct hint about the desirability of her departure, neither Pierrek nor Fäik could bring themselves to the point of committing so great a sin against the laws of kinship—severe ones, indeed, out Finisterre way!

Strangely enough, Koäder had succeeded in ingratiating herself with the most redoubtable personage in Kermarioker! The virulent Mari-Gwezek, always so prone to tear her neighbors to pieces, approved of the decorous *Ilienne*<sup>1</sup> who treated her with a singular deference, due, it is not improbable, to the latter's swift perception of the fact that the former's tongue was a power in the land.

One afternoon the Recteur's excellent housekeeper was busily engaged in cleaning her copper saucepans—the pride of her heart—which always shone like small moons, and humming the while in her thin old voice a most lamentable *gwerz*,<sup>2</sup> dealing with the adventures of an extremely wicked seigneur of the long ago. This was the old lady's way of being merry, and merry she was that day, quite extraordinarily so, for M. Kornog had gone to the nearest market-town to buy a new *soutane*—an event so rare and magnificent that his ever grumbling devoted servant felt her heart swell with pride. She made it a principle, did Mari-Gwezek, to live for the present, leaving both past and future to take care of

<sup>1</sup> Name given to women from the Islands.

<sup>2</sup> *Complainte*; otherwise ballad.

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themselves, which, although a comforting procedure, is perhaps a mistaken one, since the past, at any rate, only sleeps, and we carry it "to our damn" all through our lives, ready at any moment to arise in its might and smite us unreservedly.

The weather was not particularly pleasant, for a sour wind was blowing from the west, and Mari-Gwezek found the proximity of the cheerful turf fire on the hearth pleasing. A footstep behind her made the old woman turn her head, half expecting to see her master standing there although it was still a little too early for him to be home, but in the doorway she perceived instead the fine erect figure of Madame Le Hurec.

Entreating Mari-Gwezek not to discontinue her occupation, this amiable person brought forward a chair, sat down with that grand air which stuck to her even when accomplishing the simplest acts, and fell to admiring the row of glittering utensils ranged upon the table.

"My word, but you do make them shine, *Vamezel* Kolvestre!" Nobody in Kermarioker had ever paid Mari-Gwezek the compliment of addressing her in that ceremonious manner by her family name, and a slight flush of pleasure rose to the housekeeper's wrinkled cheeks. "There is nothing," Madame Le Hurec continued, "so fine in my opinion as copper saucepans for cooking. Of course they're expensive, but they last a lifetime, and when in careful hands like yours they are not dangerous."

"You may say so!" the gratified dame exclaimed. "I make a point of having them retinned inside twice a year. With that one needs never fear verdigris, not even when cooking mushrooms, which, let me tell you, Monsieur le Recteur would sell his little finger for!"

"He does not seem to be much of a gormandizer,"

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smiled Koäder, smoothing the stiff silken folds of her apron. "A worthy priest, your Recteur, *Vamezel* Kolvestre. I have a great respect for him!"

"Not bad hearted—but ah! Madame Le Hurec, a head! . . . all fire and flame, like gunpowder, I assure you!" She sighed, gave a little shrug that was full of meaning, and fell to rubbing a fresh saucepan with extreme complacency.

"See this now!" she said, after a short pause, brandishing the gleaming *casserole*. "I have a secret of my own for making my copper-cleanser. Many people have wanted to get it from me, but devil a bit will I give it away! No, not me!"

"You must be a veritable tomb for secrets, *Vamezel* Kolvestre! Don't they say that a priest's servant from hearing such, gets her ears sorer all the year round than the priest himself after the Lenten confessions?"

"That's true enough," Mari-Gwezek admitted, "and I flatter myself I can keep my mouth shut, which, between ourselves, is more than most women can do! If I were to say all I know, I could make the whole *Commune* fight like one man!"

Koäder had absent-mindedly taken up an oval lid from the table edge, and was amusing herself by turning it slowly backward and forward on her knee, where the light from the window could shine upon it. A gleam kindled in her eyes that had been fixed dreamily upon the exquisite brilliancy of this humble kitchen adjunct, and suddenly she said, softly, quite unconscious of speaking aloud:

"Exactly the color of Pierrek's hair!"

"Eh! What!" Marie-Gwzek exclaimed. "That scamp of a Pierrek . . . and, by-the-way, that's so . . . it is just exactly the color of his peruke! What an observer you are, Madame Le Hurec!"

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Koäder felt herself flushing crimson, and turning her shoulder towards her hostess she pulled herself together with a violent effort. She was furious with herself, and clutching at the first straw, she said, rather hurriedly: "Oh! I don't mean that it is an extraordinary color . . . nor," she added, gulping down her reluctance to belittle even in such a trifle the man she loved—"nor a very pretty one. It's odd, that's all. I've seen it before, of course, although perhaps not so pronounced!"

"Sure! So have I seen it—often I've seen it . . . not here at Kermarioker, where the hair is mostly yellow, but farther down the coast it's quite common. Here it seems rarer; that's how you came to notice it. Your cousin Fäik, come to think of it, must have been dipped in the same dye-vat when the blessed Archangel Gabriel finished fixing her up before sending her sliding through the clouds."

Koäder remained silent; she was still too much annoyed to feel like speaking.

"Haven't you observed that?" Mari-Gwezek insisted. "It's as plain as the nose on your face!"

"Oh! I don't know; it did not strike me particularly. To be candid, her hair is not half . . ." she was going to say "half so beautiful," but caught herself just in time, biting her lips till the blood retreated from them. The housekeeper, however, her tongue once started, was satisfied with any sound that did duty as an answer, so paying no heed she dipped a soft rag in her famous "copper-cleanser" and was off again, babbling like a merry brook.

"You should have seen that rascal Pierrek's mop when he was a baby! People used to give him lumps of sugar to make him take off his little cap, and one day at a fair a rich horse-dealer's wife put a gold-piece into his little fist, because she said he looked like a real cherub—a

## GRAY MIST

foreign one with a name as long as my arm that I can't recall, but that is in a big church-picture, I know, because Hoärvé Rouzik told me afterwards!"

"Was Hoärvé Rouzik a handsome man?" Koäder asked, out of a desire to demonstrate her perfect ease of mind.

"Yes and no!" quoth the old dame, pursing her withered lips. "A fine large man rather than a good-looking one."

"Anything like . . . Pierrek?" She forced herself to say the name indifferently.

"Like Pierrek!" Mari-Gwezek dropped rag and saucepan to hold both hands above her head in the extremity of denial; then suddenly dropping them to her side, she picked up her work hurriedly, and said, with striking curt-ness: "Not at all!"

"Why, what ails you?" questioned Madame Le Hurec. "Would there be anything astonishing in a son looking like his father? He certainly does not look like his mother . . . a pretty woman but somewhat insipid. No, he is not a bit like her!"

"Naturally!"

Madame Le Hurec glanced at the old woman beneath her delicately arched brows. "Why do you speak like that?" she asked. "Is there any mystery connected with Pierrek's birth?" She was speaking quite idly, merely keeping the ball rolling, without giving any importance to her question, and only a very small portion of her woman's curiosity was aroused, for knowing Mari-Gwezek to be crochety, she imagined her to be simply disinclined to joke. Thus she was thoroughly unprepared for the effect produced by her words!

Down went saucepan, rag, and copper-cleanser together, the last rolling over and over in a sticky mess

## GRAY MIST

upon the dazzlingly wax-painted brick floor, and Mari-Gwezek, white as chalk, stood trembling before her astonished visitor as if suddenly overtaken by a palsy.

"What is it?" cried the latter, rising to her feet, absolutely panic-stricken. "What is the matter with you, my dear woman? Are you ill?"

Poor Mari-Gwezek, her youthful blue eyes wide, apparently with fright, was vainly struggling for composure and for speech.

"Here, drink a glass of water!" cried the now thoroughly alarmed Koäder, and flying to the earthen *pod*<sup>1</sup> in the corner she filled a mug from its capacious flanks, and hurrying back held it to the old woman's lips.

"You gave me a fine scare!" she said, as, somewhat revived, the patient was essaying a rather ghastly smile. "Are you often taken like that?"

"Yes!" Mari-Gwezek lied deliberately but somewhat breathlessly. "It is a . . . a cramp in my liver . . . I'm addicted to it!"

Koäder stared at her for a moment with pardonable incredulity. "You should go and see a doctor," she said, at last, with an almost imperceptible sneer; "such things are serious, and might play you a bad trick, especially at your time of life!" She searched the wrinkled face with merciless scrutiny, and being a quick-witted person, decided that the source of information was dried up for the day. Those thin, trembling lips would not open again except for trivialities; so with a few further words of advice, and just enough conversational trimmings to show that she accepted the liver-cramp as a valid and sufficient excuse, this superior woman took her leave.

A few minutes later she was walking rapidly down the

<sup>1</sup> Water-jar.



## GRAY MIST

incline leading to the village. The watery sun was setting rather waveringly between sheets of palest-lilac vapor, and the fissures of the cliffs were already deep with ultramarine shadow.

"Liver-cramp!" muttered Madame Le Hurec, as she turned her back upon the little valley and went on towards the Kermario crags—"liver-cramp, of course, and it's I who will bring her a remedy for it, and for her silence, too!"

## CHAPTER XVI

Along the coast the "blind wave" do they know:

Far up the cliff some wight may chance to be  
Scanning the quiet blue-green depths below

Froned with weed, and bright anemone;

Sudden there spouteth from the sleeping sea

A wild white wrath of water, wondrous high,

Which the torn deep receiveth roaringly

On the descent—then calm the levels lie,

The man is gone: naught shows the path he vanished by.

M. M.

"GOOD-EVENING, Madame Koäder! And where are you coming from so gay?"

So absorbed had Madame been in her thoughts that she brought up with a jerk, astonished to find herself opposite Lanäik's door with Lanäik herself standing beneath the old climbing rose-tree that had just finished putting on its delicate new spring outfit.

"Why, good-evening to you, Madame Lanäik!" she affably retorted, leaning familiarly over the little garden gate; "you are going to have a wealth of roses by-and-by. What a mass of buds, to be sure!"

Lanäik had crossed the tiny plot, and was now but a few feet away. "Won't you come in and rest?" she said, politely, "before climbing the cliff-path?"

"No, thank you; you are too kind. I am late as it is, and your children would be angry with me if I kept supper waiting!"

"Bah! Pierrek has not passed yet on his way home," Lanäik smilingly declared. "He is a good son, my

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Pierrek, and he always stops a minute to see his old mother."

Madame Koäder laughed. "You are a nice one to speak of age!" she expostulated, on amiability bent; "you don't look five years older than your daughter-in-law. Surely you must have married very young!"

"Yes—I was not much more than a child . . . that's true!" the widow replied, with a weary little sigh. "It seems long ago, though, when one is left alone—the years drag."

"Now! now! my dear," and Madame Le Hurec bent forward and gave a tenderly patronizing little pat to the slender hands clasped upon the topmost bar of the gate; "you must not think of that! Remember what a happy woman you are—comfortably off, with this nice little home, and your son so well married—if I say it who shouldn't! What a comfort those grandchildren of yours must be to you, too! Myself, I dote upon Arzeläik, dear little fellow, so bright and merry—a regular burst of sunshine!"

"Oh! he is a beautiful boy!" Lanäik acquiesced, beamingly. Really, Madame Koäder was a remarkably pleasant woman! Why Fäik and Pierrek should dislike her so was beginning to seem incomprehensible to her.

"He must remind you extremely of . . . of his father at the same age!" Koäder said, tentatively, the pupils of her dark eyes narrowing suddenly to pin-points like those of a questing cat.

"Yes and no!" Lanäik said, laughing. "His father!—my! but it always seems funny to me to think of Pierrek as a father—was different in a great many ways—not quite so handsome as Arzel—that is, when he was quite a baby. Later on, after my long illness, he changed for the better, and, yes—he did look then something like Arzel does now; but not very much so!"

"Your long illness?" Koäder asked, quickly. "Was it after Pierrek's birth—I mean immediately afterwards?"

"No, he was already two years old, and the trouble was in my head—a fever of the brain I think the doctor called it. It was caused by a great fright I got!"

"Dear, dear! Perhaps a fall?" Madame suggested, blowing a few grains of sand from the top of the nearer gate-post, and watching them in their descent to the ground with absorbing attention.

"Worse than that, Madame Koäder, much worse than that! You who are not a mother may not perhaps understand how I felt . . . but just figure to yourself what it was to me when I believed my little Pierrek to have been drowned!"

"Drowned!" There was not a vestige of color left in Koäder's smooth cheeks, and she trembled so visibly that Lanäik stepped back in alarm.

"My dear Madame Koäder," she said, deeply concerned, "I am afraid I startled you! Did you ever lose any one you loved in that way?"

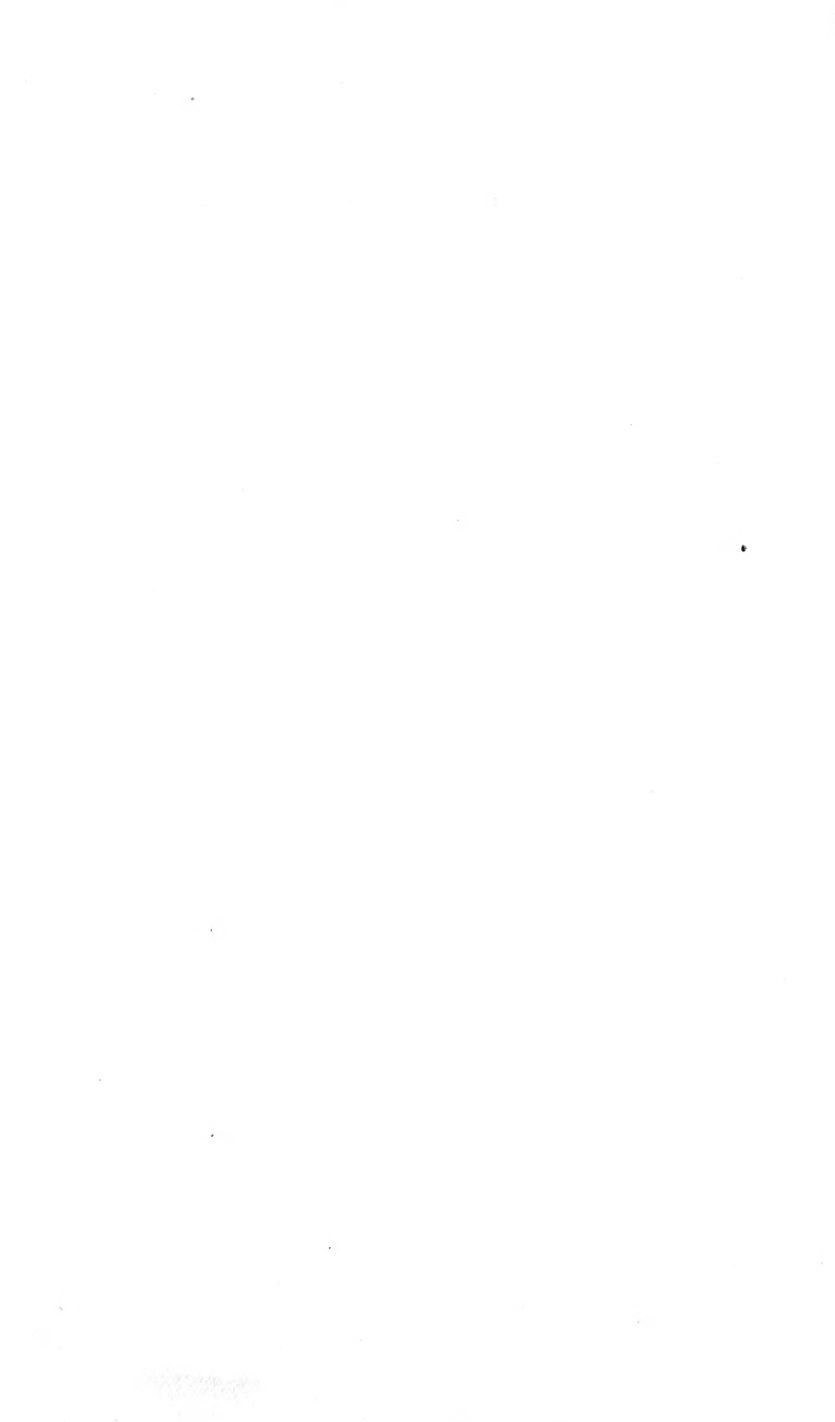
"Yes," Koäder said, with sudden fierceness, "yes—and it made me the woman I am to-day! They say I'm hard-hearted, bah!—but pray tell me about Pierrek . . . I'm all right now, only there are things . . . I don't like to think of, and"—relapsing into her usual languidly *précieuse* manner—"my poor nerves are so wretchedly delicate. I'm *such* a sufferer, although I never complain, as you may have noticed."

Poor, simple-hearted, unsophisticated Lanäik looked up thoroughly bewildered, quite dazed by these chameleonic transformations, and fell to excusing herself anew.

"I had no idea I was going to hurt you like that; I am so sorry—but you are regaining your color now—not that you ever have much. You look better; still you



THE BACK OF LANÄIK'S HOUSE



## GRAY MIST

should wait for Pierrek; that steep path may be too much for you!"

Koäder began to feel annoyed. "Enough, enough!" she interrupted. "Please don't apologize — how could you know—besides it's my fault for being so easily upset. And so your malady took the form of believing that your boy had been . . . drowned!" She hesitated over the last word just a little.

"It was not all imagination," Lanäik now wholly reassured interposed, "since my poor Hoärvé found him in the sea after searching for him ever so long—the Saints must have led him by the hand to the place!"

"Floating in the sea! My good friend, your fever *must* have been violent. Why, that's a regular fairy tale you're spinning . . . or perhaps you are merely laughing at me. It's quite allowable, you know, to hoax strangers!"

Lanäik drew back offended. "I'm afraid you must think very poorly of our manners in Kermarioker, Madame Le Hurec," she remarked, coldly, looking every whit as dignified as Madame herself could have done. "We take no such liberties with our guests here, and what I told you is the absolute truth! Of course you can believe it or not at your pleasure!"

"My dear creature! Naturally I believe you, if that's the way you take it. You must confess, nevertheless, that it's a strange story—a baby of two years taken away and brought considerably back again by our terrible sea—it does sound curious!"

"Nevertheless, it's the truth, as the Saints hear me," Lanäik asserted, quietly. "But see here, Madame Le Hurec, I'll be your debtor if you will promise me never to speak to Pierrek about this. His dear father made me swear not to tell him—I don't know why, but Hoärvé

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was a wise man who spoke no idle words, and you'd disoblige me more than you can think if you made me untrue to my promise!"

"She must have been as mad as a March hare!" Koäder reflected. "Doubtless her husband invented this rigmarole to pacify her for some purpose of his own;" and aloud she said, in her most winning manner, "You can count on me. I'm no great gossip anyhow"—which strangely enough was true—"and since you feel like that about it I'd sooner cut off my tongue than betray your confidence! But now I must really go; it's getting quite dark, and I'm an awful coward—nervousness, you know, all nervousness . . . I'm not responsible for it!"

"Won't you wait for Pierrek in that case?" Lanäik forced herself to say.

"No!" Madame Koäder exclaimed, with curious emphasis. "No, certainly not! Good-night!"

"Well, she's a queer one!" Lanäik muttered to herself, as she leaned over the gate to watch the tall, black-robed figure with its wealth of gleaming embroideries walk firmly up the winding path beyond the blind crossing, one of the branches of which led to nowhere. There was always a certain suggestion of incongruity about Madame Koäder's attitudes, her very manner of setting down her large, well-shaped foot struck a note of energy and obstinacy that did not altogether tally with the subtle air of melancholy and romance which she managed to draw about herself like some sculpturally draped mantle.

Having lost sight of Lanäik, Koäder changed to a different being. The dignified gait was abandoned, her eyes lost their languid droop, and her whole person seemed to become extraordinarily alert and wide awake, revealing the real woman, shorn of all pose. The human mind is



## GRAY MIST

a strange and cavernous storehouse, where memories that have slept for years under deep accumulations of other and more recent impressions, suddenly start up at the merest touch as vivid in contour and coloring as the amazing mural paintings of the pyramids, which, after an age-long entombment beneath those stupendous weights of stone, are revealed in all their pristine freshness by the gleam of a hand-lamp, and take the on-looker utterly aback. Without wishing to premise any corresponding clearness of vision, it may nevertheless be said that the wife of Brigadier Le Hurec—"that gold-laced coxcomb," as Fäix mockingly called him—was undergoing an analogous experience as she followed the windings of the rock-hewn path. Her life had perhaps not been quite so blissful a one as she would have had the world believe, nor was she herself perchance the absolutely hardened and unfeeling woman she was supposed to be; at any rate, Lanäik's words had been a lamp that stirred many shadows, and dimly disclosed many supposedly forgotten pictures, and there was an uncomfortable throb in her throat and an unaccustomed moisture in her eyes just then.

"Why couldn't that chattering woman have left the past alone?" she said, suddenly, almost aloud, stepping aside and halting at the extreme edge of the first cornice and gazing vacantly before her. A soft, pearly mist was creeping along the wave-crests a hundred and fifty feet below, wholly blanketing the sea, but above this the remnants of daylight still lingering behind the vanished sun hovered with peculiar tenderness, as if loath to depart from so soft a bed, and darkness was as yet far off.

"I hate to be reminded of it!" she said again, passionately, and with a flash of apparently unconquerable rage she stamped upon the verge of the crag viciously, child-

## GRAY MIST

ishly, as any other angry woman might have done. A few bits of stone displaced by her foot bounced downward with a gravelly rattle, and reached the bottom before she moved again. "I hate it . . . poor little . . . !" With a shudder that shook her from head to foot she paused, as though to listen to the muffled booming of the invisible sea, but really only conscious of a painful buzzing in her head, of a desperate effort to apprehend something that eluded her, to formulate, to co-ordinate sensations—less than sensations even, that seemed to recede as soon as she felt that they were taking shape. Her lips had unaccountably become dry and parched, and she put one hand gropingly to her forehead. Suddenly she heard a step behind her, and before she could attempt to draw back from her perilous position a strong hand seized her arm.

"That's a foolish thing to do!" Pierrek's voice said, severely; "I thought you'd have been over before I could reach you. Besides, there are sometimes blind waves here at high tide, and in this sort of weather!"

Koäder was swaying in his grasp as if about to faint, and he drew her masterfully to the other side of the narrow cliff-cornice. The tremor that shook her was not simulated, and for once in her life she could truthfully have asserted that she could not help it; also she was quite unable to speak.

"There now, sit down a bit on this ledge, cousin!" Pierrek said, almost kindly. "My mother told me to hurry, because you were afraid when it grows dark; but by all the living sardines, you must be a bold woman to risk your life looking at a fog-bank!"

"I . . . I don't know what's the matter with me!" she murmured in a trembling voice. "I have never suffered from vertigo!"

## GRAY MIST

"I dare say. You shouldn't, you women of Enez-Pers. But there's a beginning to everything, and I don't advise you to try such tricks again, more especially in the season of the blind waves!"

"Blind waves!"<sup>1</sup> she echoed, with a little, hysterical laugh. "There are none in these parts! Higher up or lower down I don't say, but here!"

"I beg your pardon, there are, and right here, too! Two years ago an oysterman from Mastrik walking along this very path was gathered up by one within sight of his mate as he was bending over that rock out there—see, you can just make it out, to the right, beyond the Mad Monk's Nose<sup>2</sup>—and he never rose again."

Leaning against the cliff-wall Koäder was gazing up at Pierrek, and not at all at the Mad Monk's Nose. "I wonder what they are?" she said, without the least tinge of curiosity in her voice, anxious only to prolong this to her delicious tête-à-tête.

"So do a great many people," he replied, gravely. "They are awful things. I don't think that I am a coward, but of those I am afraid, I can tell you. I've seen two—from a distance, fortunately—and," he concluded, hitching up his fish-basket by the strap preparatory to starting on again, "I hope I'll never see the third—nor feel it either, for three is my unlucky number."

Koäder possessed a very useful social gift, that of intuition. It was almost dangerous to think when those black eyes of hers were upon one's face, and she read

<sup>1</sup> In French "*Lames sourdes*," literally "deaf-waves." Sudden waves of inexplicable origin that shoot up out of a perfectly calm sea. They frequently leap to a great height, and often cause great destruction and loss of life.

<sup>2</sup> A peculiarly shaped projection of the cliff.

## GRAY MIST

Pierrek's thoughts now with a precision that made him look surprisedly at her.

"You are consigning me to a very warm place for keeping you so long away from—from home," she remarked, rising brusquely to her feet, "although you're too polite to say so. Let's go on," she concluded, with an embarrassed little laugh that, like everything else she did this evening, was not at all in accordance with her usual manner, "or else Fäik will be jealous!"

Pierrek gave vent to a burst of genuinely amused laughter. "Jealous! Fäik!" he exclaimed. "How little you know her! She's far too pretty to be jealous of anybody, even if she didn't know that there's but one woman in the world for me!"

Without a word Koäder passed before him and began to climb the narrow path. She could at that moment have joyfully pushed him over the edge; there was a bitterness in her mouth like the taste of aloes, and before her eyes red dots kept dancing up and down like wicked little *farfadets*.<sup>1</sup> "Fäik—always Fäik! the only woman in the world for him!" Had that pretty white neck of hers been between Madame Le Hurec's fingers she felt that she could have wrung it like a chicken's, and exulted over the chance.

"Don't go so fast!" came Pierrek's clear voice behind her. "You'll be making yourself dizzy again. Want me to give you a hand over that last rise? It's like a ladder!"

"No, thank you! Don't trouble about me!" she could not refrain from saying witheringly over her shoulder, and for a reward she divined the words "ill-tempered cat" that Pierrek was keeping with difficulty between his teeth.

<sup>1</sup> Fairies.

## GRAY MIST

Whether Fäik was jealous or not Pierrek was not destined to find out from her that night, for she received the homing pair as though their thus arriving together were the most natural thing to happen, though Koäder, who was once more mistress of all her faculties, observed with inward delight a singular green gleam in her eyes as they entered the lighted room. To see her cousin suffering would be some slight compensation to her, and a little warmth crept back into her pale cheeks at the mere thought of such a possibility.

The simple supper was a silent function. Pierrek alone seemed hungry, and the two women sitting side by side on the edge of the high hearth-stone made no pretence of eating, each occupying herself with the children in order to distract the other's attention from the continued plenitude of her plate. As soon as they could decently do so they both rose, Fäik to busy herself with the dishes, and Koäder to take little Arzel on her lap and tell him a story—as she had frequently done of late.

A glorious moon was shining outside, and Pierrek, lighting his pipe, strolled out to sit, as was his custom, on the garden wall while smoking it. Nobody could have accused him of being an enthusiastic admirer of nature's beauties, but the view that met his sight made him give a little grunt of pleasure. The clouds had entirely disappeared from a sky of transparent blue, thickly powdered with faint stars, but the white mist—now rolling in ethereally delicate undulations of silver—still hung above the mysterious sea-depths that purred drowsily under its soft caress. The fog-damp glazed the dark escarpments of the cliffs, and made them glisten as though cased in thinnest crystal, and just as the young man reached his favorite place on the wall the revolving green flame of the distant light-house swung shoreward, turning every-

## GRAY MIST

thing around him into solid emerald. Unconsciously impressed, Pierrek waited to seat himself until the sword-like ray had brusquely flashed away once more and the cold moonlight had resumed its empire of purity, frosting every twig and blade of grass, and drawing, with the aid of the ivy leaves along the wall-crest, patterns of clear precision on the flagged garden walk at his feet.

A light breeze passed suddenly across his face. The night wind was beginning to blow; the sea-voice changed to loud moanings, rising and falling like the labored breathings of some nightmare-ridden monster, and somehow Pierrek began to think with intense discomfort of Madame Koäder, and of Fäik's pale face at supper. A slight rustle made him turn his head, and there in a white patch of moonshine close to him stood Fäik herself, looking strangely tired and wan. For a second he kept his eyes upon her, almost startled by the fixity of her gaze, and all at once a thousand things that they had never told each other seemed to become almost magically clear and definite. Then they sat down side by side, and for a long while neither spoke—apparently there was no longer any need for words. At last from the half-open door of the house a small, sleepy voice was heard, saying: "Tell me another . . . a long . . . long story, Auntie Koäder . . . and then I'll go to sleep right away!"

"He has her fast!" Pierrek whispered, with a mischievous twinkle in his gray eyes, and Fäik smiled faintly. "I'm glad of it," Pierrek resumed, laying his pipe down beside him on the wall and taking Fäik's listless little fingers into his strong brown ones. The charm had been broken by that baby voice, and he would speak now. "I'm glad of it, Fäik, because she annoys me. I do not think we can stand her much longer. You are tiring yourself in trying to entertain her, and it is not for

us poor people to sacrifice peace for matters of that sort!"

Still Fäik said nothing; her little face might have been cut in alabaster for all the expression and life it possessed just then.

"You see," he continued, speaking in the slightly drawling monotone of the coast-Breton, "I'm not quite at my ease about why she's staying on and on like this. She has a reason, of course, but I can't imagine what that reason is!" The merest ghost of a smile glided across Fäik's serious lips, and was gone before he could notice it. "She may be simply spying; she has the air of an eavesdropper and a person that's none too frank—don't you think so, Fäik-gez?"

"Perhaps!"

"Or else she's been doing something not to her credit, and is keeping away from her husband. I don't like to say things like that before you, but . . . I don't know why—she doesn't seem to me to be a good woman."

The ghostly smile was there again, but now it had extended to the eyes, which for a swift instant burned green, like the pharos-flame.

"I've made up my mind, anyhow, to tell her to go." Her husband's face was in shadow, but Fäik did not need to look at him to know that the grim black cross was barring his brow now, and that he was in one of his harshest, most determined moods. "If she has something on her mind she must hurry up and tell it," he went on, unconsciously tightening his hold on the motionless little fingers. "I don't care a damn about her manœuvrings with regard to those scoundrels of Enez-Pers . . . she does not appear to carry Enez-Pers in her heart as far as one can judge!"

"Why should she? She's not from Enez-Pers!" The

## GRAY MIST

words were said, very quietly, but with a queer little underlying note of triumph. Perhaps Fäik was glad not to be obliged to lay this supreme opprobrium to Enez-Pers' account.

"Not from Enez-Pers?" Pierrek asked in astonishment. He had never spoken much to Fäik of her Island or her family, two delicate subjects under the circumstances. "Why, where is she from, then?"

"From Bar-Avel<sup>1</sup>—a good name for her birthplace. Her father and mother lived there all their lives, and when they died my parents adopted her. After their death she went to live with some relatives in Chataulin, where she was brought up like a *Démézel*,<sup>2</sup> and that's why she's so proud!"

Pierrek brought his shoulders to the level of his ears, and then drew them down slowly, accompanying this gesture of profound contempt with a low whistle. "Better for her to have remained in her stormy Bar-Avel. An imitation of anything at all disgusts me, because the truth shows through and makes it look what it is, which means not worth two sous!"

"You'd sooner have a simple peasant then, even if that isn't so fine?" There was a little tremor of anguish in the question, but far too slight to be noticed.

"A simple peasant . . . I should think so! You see, my girl, I wouldn't find rancid butter any tastier because treacle was spread thick upon it; and it's like that with your cousin; she is not fit to be under the same roof with you, in spite of her beautiful coat of varnish. Remember Tad-Askol's old sloop that he painted and polished up so grandly to make her fit to be sold? Well, she went on rotting beneath the paint, and drowned those poor

<sup>1</sup> Bar-Avel means squall, or tempest.

<sup>2</sup> Demoiselle.



## GRAY MIST

devils from Doănuizker who'd been hoodwinked into buying her! No! No! Madame Koăder Le Hurec must go, that's my last word!"

Almost imperceptibly Făik had drawn closer to her husband, and suddenly she found herself in his arms.

"My little Făik-gez," he whispered, bending his handsome head until his cheek rested caressingly against the little curls on her forehead, "you are like a Madonna to me, too pure to be put side by side with women like that *Démézel*! You are my wife, the mother of my boys, my own, own girl, who is like nothing else in the world. . . . Oh! you are more than that, but I can't tell you just what I feel; my tongue is always tied when I'm near you, and I get stupid and dumb!"

Two tears, round as the beads of a crystal rosary, were hanging to Făik's long eyelashes, and he stooped and kissed them away. "Don't cry!" he pleaded, very low. "To-morrow we'll be by ourselves again, and you will be singing once more! And now," he said, straightening his broad shoulders and speaking in his ordinary, somewhat imperative manner, "she will be coming out here, for Arzelăik must be asleep. Slip into the house, and leave her to me!"

Făik, sliding to her feet, looked at him for the fraction of a second, and with a sudden feeling of absolute content, turned and obeyed him.

## CHAPTER XVII

When grays the dawn, and in the room  
Dim shapes define amid the gloom,  
Then furtive feet pace there and here,  
And worn eyes through the shutters peer  
Where the cold east begins to bloom.

Then little prowling winds exhume  
The dead world from her misty tomb,  
Cereclothed and rigid on her bier,  
When grays the dawn.

And deep in Memory's caverned womb  
Dark Anguish labors at her loom.  
"Thank God, the sun!"—spear after spear  
Far-piercing, glorious, golden-clear!  
Oh, pray that Slumber stir no plume  
When grays the dawn!

M. M.

PIERREK waited calmly for Madame Koäder, and did not have long to wait either, for, as he had surmised, she soon appeared, walking in her stately way down the short path. She had tried most methods—and she possessed many—utterly in vain to attract Pierrek. She had attempted to coax, to dazzle, to pique, to overawe, to win, but the result spelled failure, and she knew it. She was determined now to use her last reserve, a blunt avowal of her feelings, and what this last reserve might bring about she herself was not quite certain, for Pierrek and Pierrek's vagaries were uncertain quantities, even to her shrewdness.

## GRAY MIST

She looked her best as she stopped in front of him exactly on the spot where Fäik had just stood, her delicate complexion enhanced by a suspicion of pink, her black eyes shining like onyx in the moonlight. This was not by any means a Breton type of womanhood, nor one that possessed any seductions for Pierrek, but still he confessed to himself much against his will that she was certainly exceedingly handsome!

He was no diplomat, was poor Pierrek—the word even would have been as unintelligible to him as it had been once to Mari-Gwezek—and his *entrée en matière* lacked the very rudiments of finesse!

"You'll have fine weather for your return trip," he said, beaming upon her as though imparting the most welcome piece of news, and with a sweep of his arm he indicated the peeping stars, the smiling moon, and the silver-shrouded horizon where Enez-Pers lay concealed.

Not a muscle of Koäder's calm face moved. The faint rose of her cheeks vanished, and the gleam in her eyes went out like a snuffed candle, but not by the slightest gesture did she betray her feelings.

"For your return trip to Enez-Pers," Pierrek amiably insisted, "good winds, a flat sea, and no prospect of storm!"

Had he but known it, storm of another kind, and in nearest possible prospect, was gathering at that moment, but without one premonitory ripple.

"Yes," Madame Koäder said, quietly, "I think it will continue fine for the rest of the month." (This was the fourth day of May, and Pierrek started perceptibly.) "Your hospitality, my cousin, is so enjoyable that I cannot make up my mind to leave you all quite yet. Moreover, the object of my visit has not been accomplished!"

Pierrek was staring in amazement at the placid face;

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the even tone and perfect control of the harmonious voice grated upon him unendurably, and, as he would have expressed it, he was losing his bearings somewhat.

"You mean this imbecile mix-up between your people and ours?" he questioned, keeping hold of his own collar, metaphorically speaking, to prevent his ending the interview then and there, sailor-fashion, and all sails to the wind! The unparalleled impudence of Madame Koäder was fast rousing the devil in him.

"Of course! That is what I came here for; at least to try and put an end to this unfortunate affair."

"And doubtless that is also why you have not made one step nor said one word in that direction for a fortnight!"

"Fäik has been asking him to send me away," thought Koäder. "I'll pay her out for this with the rest!" and majestically sitting down on the ivy-garlanded wall, she said, aloud: "During this fortnight my ideas have changed concerning the feud . . . and many other things besides."

Pierrek rose, and in his turn stood before her, his face in shadow. "Perhaps," he said, curbing his exasperation, "you will be so good as to tell me—since I am supposed to be the leader of the Kermarioker *gars*—what you propose to do!"

Deep as a well was Madame Koäder, and by no means lacking in that *savoir-faire* which had been so conspicuously omitted from Pierrek's otherwise exceedingly satisfactory make-up. To push matters to a crisis now would mean an irreparable break, with no chance whatsoever of approaching Pierrek again, and although almost bursting with fury, she was far too wise to precipitate matters, so making a *volte-face* of the most pronounced character, she forced herself to smile, and with a look of angelic suavity said, gently:

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"Did you think that I would decide upon a single point without first consulting with you, my cousin? The situation—although you may have believed that I gave it but scant attention—is far more complicated than I at first believed. I have had some serious talks with that excellent man, your ex-guardian, and also with your mother, Pierrek, who is a remarkably clear-sighted woman. Moreover, I have communed with myself, and have come to the conclusion that your wife alone can satisfactorily bring affairs to a finish!"

"Fäik! What has she to do with it?"

"Why, everything, it seems to me. She is the cause of the feud, is she not?"

"Well . . . of course . . . certainly, the innocent cause!" Pierrek said, gazing at her in bewilderment.

"The innocent cause—naturally!" she replied, in that well-modulated even tone of voice he disliked so greatly. "But innocent or not . . . she is the direct cause, and she alone can put a stop to what she has brought about!"

"And how?" he asked, impatiently, coming a step nearer.

"By telling Kenderf<sup>1</sup> Klaoda that she wishes the hostilities to cease!"

"What's that you say?" he asked, in a low voice that anger hoarsened. "You want my wife to go and ask favors from that drunken brute? Are you serious, Koäder? Because if this is a joke it is one I don't mean to stand!"

"I'm not joking, I assure you!" she answered, coldly. "Klaoda may be a drunkard, but he's not the man to show disrespect to a kinswoman, and he loves Fäik far too dearly to refuse her anything she asks."

<sup>1</sup> Cousin.

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"He does! does he!" Pierrek muttered through his teeth. "Well, that being so, I absolutely refuse to have anything more to do with your cursed peaceful projects, and," he concluded, with alarming violence, "you can take it from me that I will go out of my way to meet him as soon as possible, and break his worthless neck when I do!"

For the first time during this unpleasant interview Madame Koäder let her inward agitation get the better of her. "You won't do that, Pierrek!" she cried, leaping to her feet and catching him by the arm; "for pity's sake don't risk your life any more than you have done!" The deep anguish in her voice would have struck him had he been cooler, but he was past noticing such trifles, and brushing her hand from his rough woollen sleeve as if it had been a fly, he exclaimed:

"Risk my life! . . . What the hell do I care about that! I'm not much of a boaster, but I tell you to-night that before a week is over our heads, either Klaoda Karádek or I will have left this part of the world for good and all. Now are you satisfied, Madame Le Hurec? And now good-night! You can stay here, or go back to Enez-Pers and warn your cousin of my intentions, but if you value your husband's neck, don't mention a word of all this to Fäik, because as sure as you let her find out about it I'll include Brigadier Le Hurec in the feud, and turn my attention to him immediately after I get through with Klaoda!" And without another look he turned on his heel, and, banging the gate behind him, strode down the path, leaving the utterly dismayed woman alone in the garden, possessed by a sudden and extremely undignified desire to scream.

For a moment she listened to his retreating footsteps with compressed lips and heaving shoulders, the bit-

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terest drop in her cup of misery being that she had brought this scene deliberately upon herself. How could she have guessed, however, that the Klaoda project had never been mentioned to Pierrek? The Recteur had told her in the course of one of their conversations that Fäik absolutely refused to see her quondam suitor, and this had been her chief reason for trying to make Pierrek urge her to do so—the cleverest sometimes make such mistakes! Nor had she ever supposed the young husband to be so bitterly jealous—which made mistake number two; but then she had always seen him so calm and unemotional and self-possessed, that there perhaps she might find some excuse for herself.

There was a sudden horror in Madame Koäder's eyes as she gazed vacantly at the extraordinary moon-glade shredding the billowy layers of mist as jagged scissor-cuts might do with the folds of a white gauze stretched upon cloth of silver. For the second time that day she was at a loss what to do. Her brain whirled painfully in her head, pivoting around one central thought: to reconquer the ground she had just lost at any cost, any price; but her whole being was absolutely paralyzed by the, to her, novel feeling that this was something even she could not accomplish. And yet she loved Pierrek with that love which comes once only in a lifetime! Her white teeth closed on her lower lip with cruel force, and she stood there as motionless as the gate-post at her side, but her breath coming and going with a sound that was almost a sob.

"He must not find me here when he comes back," she thought all at once, and noiselessly, on tiptoe, controlling her emotion as best she could, she glided behind the hedge of currant-bushes that being now very thick and tall almost concealed her; skirted the house, and entered

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her own room without, as she imagined, being seen by Fäik from the house.

She spent the next few hours walking up and down like some caged wild animal, but treading softly on the bare boards with stockinged feet, and in almost total darkness, except for the faint moon reflection filtering through the creepers garlanding her window. She had been hoist by her own petard, and her humiliation at so great a piece of clumsiness rankled deeply; and added to all her other present humiliations, fear, such as she had never known, pierced her very soul. What if Pierrek had put his threat into immediate execution? What if he was even now sailing towards Enez-Pers and—Klaoda?

She crept out again, pausing between every step, avoiding every pebble of the little circular path round the house that might have rolled under foot, and crouched beneath Fäik's window. The shutters were drawn almost to, and she saw no light within, nor did she hear any sound, be it ever so faint. Had Pierrek returned? It was quite possible for him to have done so without her becoming aware of it, for those granite houses of Brittany are peculiarly "deaf." What if she simulated sudden illness, and called her cousin? Yet no, she could not face Fäik just now, and with the same exasperating precautions she slowly regained her room.

Pierrek had returned after giving himself an hour's rapid walk on the shingle to calm his rage—a proceeding that even to the strongest is something of a trial, for a shingle beach is no very agreeable promenade—and letting himself in noiselessly—everybody seemed afraid to break the silence that night—had rejoined Fäik.

Perfectly trustful that her husband's methods would rid her of Koäder, she had stretched herself on the bed without undressing, holding little Tamek in the hollow of



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her arm, and, tired out by a long day's work, in a few minutes she was fast asleep, curled up like a child in her cosey nest. The delicately carved shutters of the *lit-clos* were thrown wide, and for a few minutes Pierrek stood looking at the pretty picture within by the light of the tallow dip burning on a near-by table. Fäik's cheeks, flushed by the deep sleep of early youth, were of the color of pink hawthorn, her long lashes rested upon them like a velvet fringe, and she looked the incarnation of life's innocent, happy spring-time. At last, very gently, Pierrek awakened her.

"Oh!" she said, plaintively, "is it already morning?"

"No, no!" he replied, in that hushed voice in which it seems natural to speak to awakening children, "I have only just come in. Get undressed, and you can continue your nap."

"Have you told Koäder?" she murmured, drowsily, sitting up with her baby still in her arms, and preparing to stand upon the *banc-de-lit*<sup>1</sup> by gradually sliding her little feet over the high edge of the piled-up mattresses.

"Yes. Don't worry, and give me the *bugel*.<sup>2</sup> You'll let him drop in a minute."

She gave a clear, low laugh, as fresh and merry as a summer dawn, and complying with his request, stood swaying sleepily, watching him tuck the slumbering Tamek in his cradle before blowing out the candle. Bretons always undress in the dark when not alone, for familiarity brings no contempt with it in this benighted portion of the world.

Pierrek was very tired, and when he finally got to bed, for a few hours he slept profoundly. In the ordinary way he would have slept on till sunrise, but strangely

<sup>1</sup> Broad bench or step by the side of the cupboard-bed.

<sup>2</sup> Nursling.

enough just before dawn he found himself wide awake again. The first fatigue of the body was past, and the busy mind asserted itself. He had been worried more than he would have cared to own by his stormy discussion with Koäder, and the moment he was half awake his thoughts leaped into that unpleasant channel and roused him completely.

The silence was almost startling in its dead depth, that was only intensified by the low voice of the full, quiet tide lapping the foot of the cliffs, and it was quite dark in the room, for the moon, who at the time of his return home had been playing hide-and-seek with the stars amid a curious rimelike formation of snow-white fern-shaped cloudlets, had now veiled herself *à la Bretonne* preparatory to retiring to her soft bed of downy vapors, and Pierrek dropped his head again on the pillow.

He did not fall asleep, however, and suddenly the ever-watchful Gouillas, from his perch beneath the wide stone-mantel of the hearth, said cavernously, in dull muffled tones: "*Libera nos a malo!*"

Pierrek cursed softly through his teeth. That wise bird's Latin orations were at times too much for him in their singular *à propos*. Involuntarily he began to listen almost nervously for the faint rustling of feathers in the corner, expecting to be annoyed by some further citation, and in a few moments Gouillas fulfilled this anticipation by beginning to chuckle derisively to himself.

"Shh . . . shh!" Pierrek whispered, afraid to wake up Fäik and the children, and yet filled with a curious desire to silence the loquacious bird; but this doubtless seemed to the latter something of an impertinence, for after some premonitory clappings of his beak, he hoarsely gabbled a "Go out to meet the devil, the devil, the devil!" that sent a thrill down Pierrek's spine.

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In an instant he was out of bed and at the half-shuttered window, as though in search of that Evil One whose fateful presence would somehow have been perfectly in keeping with his present mood. All was silent outside—and to all appearances peaceful. The mist gleamed white beneath the shrouded pallor of the moon, but away off above the gates of dawn a sharp double-line of crude lemon-yellow brutally cut the vapors along the horizon. After a while, however, Pierrek, listening intently for he knew not what, thought that he heard a singular sound, regular as the monotonous ticking of a clock, but soft and furtive. Could it be footsteps within the house? Quickly and noiselessly he dressed himself, and snatching up his *béret* went cautiously to the door.

Bolts and locks are not considered a necessity of life in Brittany, and he therefore let himself out, as he thought, unheard by all the inmates of his sleeping home, and yet hardly had he taken two steps around the corner of the house than he found himself face to face with Koäder, calm and dignified of attitude as ever, but pale to the lips with a paleness that seemed almost corpselike in the gray twilight of early dawn.

"What are you doing here?" he asked, quietly, every nerve now as steady as steel, for he felt in some unaccountable way that he was touching the very core of a situation that had worried him subliminally since many days.

She did not answer at once. She was standing within a foot of him, and her dark eyes, abnormally enlarged by some strong emotion, looked unwinkingly into his.

"Where are you going?" she asked, at length, answering woman-like by another question.

"What is that to you?" he said, coldly.

A sudden wave of terror swept over the frozen features

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of the strange woman, and she murmured, hoarsely: "I knew it; I knew it; you are bent upon going to get yourself killed by those savages of Enez-Pers—Oh! Pierrek! Pierrek!"

"Now, look here, Koäder!" he said, in his most masterful way, "this sort of thing won't do. I'm not overfond of being watched and spied upon like this. Come away from the house; we don't want to wake up Fäik, and tell me once and for all what your behavior means!"

Obediently she followed him across the back garden, where the first faint glow of the awakening day was beginning to tinge the petals of Fäik's favorite white petunias with almost invisible rose, and at a gesture from him sat down upon the wooden bench behind the box hedge. It was going to be warm again, and from the pine-trees in the valley of Kermario a strong and subtle scent, such as they only emit in spring, was rising. The furze-clad slopes near by added their discreet contribution to this exquisite fragrance, and not far away the border of white violets shook out in their early morning shiver upon the freshness of the transparent atmosphere the breath of their hundred little perfumed throats.

Madame Koäder stirred uneasily, and looked up into Pierrek's face. Her eyes growing accustomed to the misleading light of that green-shadowed nook, could discern every change in his expression, and what she saw was not encouraging.

"I do not wish to quarrel with you, Koäder," he said, after an almost imperceptible pause, "but we had better come to an understanding!" He stopped to give her time to explain herself, but still she remained mute, her eyes now cast down and intent upon a little branch of box that she had mechanically broken off from the tall bush beside her, and was slowly pulling to pieces.

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"You are, to tell you the plain truth, a great deal too mysterious in your doings . . . not frank enough by half, and I don't like it!"

With a quick tension of every nerve and muscle she interrupted him. "You want me to be frank . . . absolutely frank?" she asked, a little breathlessly, and fixing upon him eyes that had lost every vestige of their customary want of lustre, and were shining like the rich heart of a very deep-hued garnet.

"Yes—certainly I do. All these dark doings and sayings of yours are annoying. Can't you speak for once like somebody who has nothing to fear or conceal?"

In a flash she was on her feet, confronting him, one trembling hand at the chain of her marriage cross, as though the heavy golden strands were choking her. She was wondering vaguely in this last second of reason whether he would kill her when she told him, but speak she must: nothing on earth could stop her now.

Pierrek, astonished at her expression, was gazing at her. He was not a subtle man at all, and, alas! was Breton and old-fashioned enough to look upon women as something essentially above and essentially purer than men. His mother and Fäik were like that, and all the others he had hitherto met during his clear young life. Therefore, he was even yet, stupid as it may seem, a thousand leagues away from realizing that this one was different, spoiled by over-education and the foul air of a city. Silently he waited, standing before her in his great calm strength and marvellous youth; tall, handsome, indifferent, a man in a thousand, and a fit one to love.

She leaned forward, with down-drawn brows and suddenly fiery cheeks, peering into his ever slightly contemptuous face.

"I love you!" she said, brutally.

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Pierrek's eyes opened to their widest, and, looking straight at her, he spat upon the ground. On his young face there was an expression of disgust so absolute that words were not needed, and Koäder, with an exclamation of intense pain, stepped back, still gazing at him like one hypnotized, but with a strange new expression that was neither fury nor abasement convulsing her whole countenance.

Through all her shame, her anger, her agony, an undercurrent of irrelevant thought was racing, beating madly against some dim barrier of the brain. "Where have I seen this face of anger and contempt before . . . where . . . where?" and all at once she shrieked, "The cross! the cross! . . . Bihan-Gwennéal . . . Bihan-Gwennéal!"<sup>1</sup>

Ah! Now she knew . . . that trick of the dark eyebrows had burst the restraining wall, and like a freed torrent all the discoveries of the last twenty-four hours flooded down the slope of her mind! This Pierrek Rouzik—never! but Gwennéal Karádek, the little cousin she herself had forgotten in the *kinàu*, and left to drift away and be drowned twenty-two years before. . . . Pierrek Rouzik! . . . Oh! what had Mari-Gwezek said . . . what had Lanäik meant, then . . . ?

In the stunning suddenness of the discovery the full horror of the thing did not penetrate to her rocking senses: the blow had been too swift for that; but while he was turning away, thinking her completely unhinged and best left alone until he could summon more coolness to his aid in dealing with the question of her instant departure, she saw—and with one wild clutch at his shoulder she cried, in a voice no longer like her own but cracked and hoarsened as that of an old woman:

<sup>1</sup> Petit Ange—little angel.

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"You can't go back there"—one shaking hand pointed towards the house—"not to Fäik—not to Fäik!"

"What the red-helled malediction do you mean?" he asked, turning fiercely upon her, and shaking off her hand as if it had been something too loathsome to endure. "Don't you dare to utter my wife's name!"

Koäder looked at him, and then burst into low, gurgling laughter—the most blood-curdling and mirthless sound he had ever heard. "Not utter Fäik's name!" she shrieked, at last, as a mad woman might have done in the extremity of a paroxysm. "Your wife's name . . . ! She's not your wife . . . she's your . . . your sister!" Then she collapsed upon the bench with a dropping lip, gulping down something in her throat, something that would not be swallowed.

Pierrek bending forward saw the chattering jaw, the wild eyes looking up at him in that terrible red way, and shuddered.

"Mad!" he muttered, "mad!" But his own face was growing pale, and he, too, was breathing heavily.

## CHAPTER XVIII

Drifteth the mist; the coiling veil,  
Down-dropt in many a cobweb trail,  
Unrolleth, lengtheneth filmily  
And soft—oh, velvet soft, till ye  
Are lost in grayness, blank and pale.

And in one level-balanced scale  
Hang strength and weakness, oar and sail.  
Ah, to such dread equality  
Drifteth the mist!

Then what is left when all things fail?  
A courage clad in linkéd mail,  
A pride unmaimed, that manfully  
Ye may go down into the sea,  
When on the wreck of storm and gale  
Drifteth the mist!

M. M.

THE Recteur of Kermarioker was comfortably sleeping in his white-draped four-poster. His trip to town had tired him much, for, iron-muscled though he was, and well used to every sort of bodily fatigue, yet the noise and comparative hurry and bustle of even a Breton *chef-lieu*—and Heaven only knows that at its highest culminating point this would seem stagnation to any other city in Europe—"broke his head," as he expressed it. He had been overjoyed to return to his flower-bowered presbytery, his cheerful fireside and roomy slippers, and after a light meal had almost at once retired. At present he was dreaming that the old *patache* in which he had



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travelled was once more rumbling over the pointed paving-stones of the narrow streets with a noise which at first he hardly heeded. Soon, however, it increased to such an extent and became so persistent that he lazily unclosed his eyes . . . not in order to discover the origin of the sound, since his sleeping mind rested assured that it was due to the wheels of the clumsy conveyance, but just because eye and ear had acted in unison for so long that they did so now without any volition on his part.

The noise grew louder still, and for the second time the Recteur's eyes opened—uncomprehendingly at first, and then suddenly filled with alarm, for somebody was beating a truly infernal tattoo upon his window-shutters. There was something familiar, too, in the energy of the action, and almost immediately he called out: "Is that you, Pierrek?"

"Yes!" came the answer from the outside, and there was something in the voice that made M. Kornog jump from his bed and hurry into his clothes as if the house were on fire. Indeed, not two minutes did it take him to make himself semi-presentable and run to the front door, which he threw open, letting in at one and the same time the shimmering rosy rays of a splendid dawn, and Pierrek, barely recognizable in his white wrath of fury, dragging by the shoulder a staggering haggard-faced woman who seemed scarcely able to stand on her feet.

"Holy Saints of Heaven!" the priest cried, stepping back in consternation at sight of the once stately Madame Koäder. Mechanically, scarcely conscious of what he was doing, he pushed the strange pair into his study, and, hardly daring to question them, stood for a moment gazing helplessly from one to the other. Strong, hardened, weather-beaten man that he was, his nerves

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were all a-tingle, his flesh creeping with dread. With a groan Koäder cast herself upon a chair, and covering her face with her hands, began to rock to and fro in a voiceless agony that the last half-hour might have caused in a woman ten times as vigorous as herself, while Pierrek, his shoulders against the door, which he had closed with a backward kick, stood gulping down some nameless nauseating horror before trusting himself to speak.

Then at last the Curé spoke: "For God's sake, Pierrek, what is it?"

Pierrek raised his arm sharply, and brought it down with its full weight upon the woman's heaving shoulder. "Ask her!" he said, through his clinched teeth. Visibly he could say no more, although, as the silence of the room remained unbroken, he twice attempted to do so. His lips moved, but no sound came from them, and to make *her* speak at least he began to shake her like a garment. M. Kornog, who had been unconsciously holding tight to the back of a chair with both hands, rushed forward.

"Let go of her!" he cried. "Pierrek, what are you doing? You—and brutalizing a woman!"

"She's not a woman, she's a hell-fiend, do you hear, Monsieur le Recteur!" he at last burst forth. "That a woman—oh! holy Virgin-Mother, no woman, be she ever so vile, would have done what she has done to-night!" He gasped like a drowning man, clutching vainly about him for something to cling to, and continued hacking his words as if each separate one blistered his tongue. "She told me that I am not my father's son . . . nor my mother's either," he added, with a bitter crack of laughter, "and what more do you think she says?"

The priest's face went white, then crimson, and murmuring below his breath, "The day of reckoning for me!"

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he stood immovable, vaguely wondering what next would come.

"She says—" Pierrek resumed and stopped, his lips working convulsively, and in the eyes he turned upon Koäder a flame of murderous hatred and deadly rage, "she says that . . . oh! Christ, how can I tell it . . . she says that F . . ." his tongue stumbled over that beloved name, "that F . . . Fäik is . . . my sister!"

The priest moved back feebly to the table, and sank down half-sitting on it. His strong face was suddenly vacant, and his teeth chattered a little. This silence, this shuddering stupor, unnerved Pierrek more than any errified exclamation might have done, since, overwhelmed as he had been by Koäder's absolute certainty, this brought blindingly before him for the first time the possibility of the horror being true. He glanced slowly round the dim room, with, in those deep-set gray eyes of his, the dawning of an immeasurable despair.

"Tell me that it is impossible—that it cannot be!" he whispered unsteadily, trying to read the Curé's face.

"I don't . . . know!" the wretched man answered, his expression one of shuddering bewilderment.

"But you must know—you must!" Pierrek's voice rose to a cry. "You are the one to know. You were my father's and mother's friend"—again he gave that terrible laugh—"my father and mother . . . those I have called so anyhow . . . you knew me always! Am I their son . . . Hoärvé and Lanäik Rouzik's son, I mean—yes or no?"

"No," the priest muttered, very low.

Pierrek heard, and it seemed to him that he was falling, falling, and still falling, through immeasurable depths of blinding darkness. His teeth went down upon his underlip, and a curious feeling of physical sickness

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came upon him. Harder and harder he set his teeth, and the taste of his own blood felt salty in his mouth, though he did not know that he was biting his lip through. Great spots of silver were leaping and forming into intricate rings before his eyes, and then it seemed to him that Fäik's face was gazing at him through these devilish arabesques—full of a reproach intense and supplicating.

"And I thought that I alone would expiate!" the priest was dully thinking, "I alone!" He was utterly confused and too deeply horrified to move, but after what seemed a period of incalculable length he began to feel the strangling stupor that held him mute relax, and rising to his feet he crossed over to Koäder, still rocking herself to and fro after the manner of one bereft of reason.

"What makes you think this thing?" he said, speaking suddenly in a very distinct voice, as if afraid that she would not understand. "What makes you think it?"

Koäder looked up for the first time, and M. Kornog recoiled before the expression that swept across her face. The veil of unreality was being torn asunder before his eyes, revealing the hideous naked truth, for to him, the reader of human nature, this woman's eyes were not those of a liar. For an instant they stared at each other, and then Koäder began to speak: at first in a mechanical, toneless voice, then more rapidly, with a hard certainty of accent that none who heard could doubt. Her two hearers listened without a word of protest or interruption, Pierrek with the back of his hand pressed against his bleeding lip, M. Kornog now and again passing a finger across his forehead, from which drops of perspiration dripped slowly.

"And," concluded the monotonous voice at last, "I knew him"—she inclined her head towards Pierrek—"this morning by his frown . . . knew him without the

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possibility of a mistake . . . how I did not do so before I cannot explain . . . perhaps my love for the man effaced the remembrance of the child." She was avowing this shameful passion unhesitatingly now before the priest, who had heard so many confessions of human weakness, and the man who had inspired it. "Two or three times I had thought that he reminded me of some one, but the resemblance always eluded me . . . and I did not dwell much on it!"

"But you may be mistaken!" M. Kornog cried, suddenly, clinging against reason and conviction to a last desperate hope. "How can you be certain? Think well . . . a baby of two years . . . and a grown man. . . . It is so long ago!"

Koäder smiled, and it was ghastly, this contraction of the pale lips in that haggard face. "There is one more proof you can find," she said, slowly. "When he was but one year old I let a pan of boiling water fall on his foot—the left one—oh! I have brought him nothing but bad luck! There must be a scar, for the scald was deep."

There was silence for a few miserable seconds, and then, very deliberately, Pierrek drew forward a chair and sat down. The priest and Koäder bending forward at one and the same time were watching him, and surely one could hear the beating of their two hearts. The light canvas shoe fell on the floor, and was followed by the dark-blue woollen sock knitted by Fäik. The foot, neat and well shaped, as is only the case with people who never hamper or cramp it, was sunburned, for Breton fishermen go mostly barefooted, and a little below the instep a faint cicatrice, formed like a three-pointed star, showed whitely.

They sat quite still, all three of them, in utter silence, looking at the tiny white mark that meant so terrible a

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certitude. For two of them at least no time was needed for the analysis of their sensations: they knew that all the world was changed for them.

"What year, what day of the month was it, that—that your little cousin disappeared?" M. Kornog said, after a moment, turning to Madame Koäder, and her answer made him wince. "The fourteenth of August—the fourteenth!" he said, hesitatingly, searching his brain for some discrepancy—some thin loop-hole of escape. Then rushing across the room he opened the door and shouted in a voice that shook the very window-frames:

"Mari-Gwezek—quick, Mari-Gwezek . . . come here!"

In a moment another door overhead was flung wide, and an angry, startled voice cried: "Is the house afire? What's the matter with you, M. Alanik?" followed by the sound of shuffling feet descending the stairs.

Mari-Gwezek pinned and laced in her decorous Breton costume was still a very pretty little old woman, but Mari-Gwezek *en déshabillé*, clad in a scanty black underskirt and a sleeping-jacket of flowered calico, her bare feet in gaudy slippers a couple of sizes too large, and a pink-checked handkerchief knotted over her *serre-tête*,<sup>1</sup> would at another time have been something to smile at.

With an angry light in her vivid blue eyes she literally bounced into the room; but at sight of the faces about the table her wrathful countenance underwent a startling transformation, her wrinkled cheeks lost their pretty, enduring bloom, and her voice faltered—guiltily, one would almost have sworn—as she asked:

"What do you want, Monsieur le Recteur?"

Her tone was unbelievably meek, and evinced no astonishment whatsoever at finding her master, his *soutane*

<sup>1</sup> Little, tight-fitting muslin skull-cap, worn by Breton peasant women under the coiffe.

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buttoned all awry, his feet in slippers almost as ill-fitting as her own, and his face black as thunder, entertaining two guests at five o'clock in the morning. Without even looking at her, M. Kornog said, curtly:

"What day of the month was it that Hoärvé Rouzik found the baby he brought home to his wife?"

"I knew it! I knew it!" wailed the old woman. "Ah! it's all the fault of my cursed tongue-wagging. . . . Why did I do it, Saints above, why did I? . . . Give me a penance, a hard one, too, M. Alanik! Tell me to walk to St. Anne de la Palude with dry beans in my shoes, and I'll do it, or . . . !"

"Have you gone mad, Mari-Gwezek?" the priest interrupted, sternly. "Who's talking of you? Gather yourself together! I'm asking you whether you remember. . . ."

But Mari-Gwezek, carried completely out of herself, had turned violently upon Madame Koäder.

"I thought you were a respectable woman, Madame le Hurec, and here you go making all that trouble for me, taking words out of my mouth to throw at innocent people's heads . . . words, too, that I never had in my mouth at all. . . . You villain! . . . You gossip without shame! You took the very thoughts from my head, and flung them at that poor woman like the snake you are. But I'll teach you . . . I'll . . . !"

"Stop that foolishness!" said Pierrek, seizing her shoulder, and his voice choked the words in her throat. "Say quick what you know about the little one my father found. It's a matter of life and death to me . . . and a few others besides!" he concluded, grimly, his white face now set like flint, his swollen underlip adding a fierceness to his expression that it did not need to terrify the shrinking old woman.

"Yes, yes, Pierrek," she muttered, hurriedly, "I'll tell

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you, my little *Paotrik*,<sup>1</sup> all you want to know. I mind it, alas! too well, that misty day when poor Hoärvé brought home that *Mab-Ab-Koabr*.<sup>2</sup> Your mother was turning 'innocent' with grief at your death—" She stopped, bewildered by her own tangled story, and looked helplessly around. "I don't know. The devil must be in this!" and she crossed herself three times rapidly. "Let me explain," she resumed, clawing at her silvery bandeaux, dishevelled now and hanging in disorder over her wrinkled brow. "You see, *Paotrik*, your father loved your mother so, that when you died of the fever. . . ." She stamped her foot in impotent fury. "*Hano Doué!*"<sup>3</sup> she cursed, without the least regard for her master's priestly ears—" *Hano Doué!* Am I going to get through with it? No, don't try and help me, M. Alanik, don't . . . you will only make it worse; let me tell it as best I can! The doctor said Lanäik would go mad . . . she was almost so then, and Hoärvé found the *Mab-Ab-Koabr* on the sea floating about like a *Kollidik - Apouliëk* and brought it home to her. We all swore we'd never tell her . . . you, too, Monsieur le Recteur, like the rest, and we never did, and she'll go mad again if you do . . . misery on us all! and all that on account of this honey-tongued stranger, who's married to a dog of a *gwiraër*,<sup>4</sup> and has lost all right to talk about us good Bretons for good or evil!"

Pierrek once more brought his hand down upon her shoulder, but gently this time, and almost coaxingly. There was a faint softening of pity in his eyes for the poor harassed old woman and a softer note in his voice.

"What day was it, Mari-Gwezek—what day?"

<sup>1</sup> Boy.

<sup>2</sup> Son of the Cloud.

<sup>3</sup> *Nom de Dieu!* (Name of God.) A severely reprovèd blasphemy in Brittany.

<sup>4</sup> Tax-gatherer.



"What day?" she echoed. "What day? . . . Oh! yes. . . . It was in August, I know that . . . because of the great sardine catch that year. . . . Oh! now I can tell you. It was on the eve of the Assumption of our Blessed Lady the Holy Virgin Mary . . . !"

"The fourteenth of August. God have mercy on us!" the Curé exclaimed, turning, if possible, a shade whiter. "Are you sure, Mari-Gwezek, quite, quite sure?"

"Am I sure, M. Alanik? . . . am I sure that I'm alive to see this cursed hour?—Yes, yes, sure, and so would you be if you'd only stop to think. . . . Old Glao-Vraz was dying that day, and you were away carrying the Blessed Extreme Unction to him, and next morning. . . ."

With a sigh, bitterer than a groan, M. Kornog turned away. The case was proven now beyond a doubt—and a hush filled the place, like some tangible and strangling thing. Never had that quiet room of the priest's been so silent. Koäder sat motionless as she had been since she last had spoken, gazing in a sort of fixed fascination at Pierrek, who leaned heavily upon the table; Mari-Gwezek, speechless for once, glanced wildly from face to face.

The Curé walked to the window, and stood staring out unseeingly at the magnificence of sunrise, his broad back turned uncompromisingly upon his companions in misery. Down beneath him, somewhere in the hill-side tangle of furze and bracken, a crackling of branches was becoming audible, but he did not hear it, and at length he turned slowly round again. In his deep eyes there was the hopeless look of a strong man cornered by an overwhelming force.

"And," he said, despairingly, "I had taken all precautions, made every inquiry. . . . But who would have

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thought of Bar-Avel . . . a village miles and miles away! . . . And that's our fashion here; another village is a strange land to us!"

"The *Ann-Dinaou* . . . that *Ann-Dinaou* of the drowned, brought him!" wailed Mari-Gwezek. "The Corpses' Highway!"

Pierrek looked at her; he had grown ten years older in the last few hours. "Heaven be cursed that it did not keep me!" he said.

The others did not stir. They had nothing to say, and seemed to be waiting in breathless suspense for something . . . some merciful awakening from this awful nightmare . . . and just then this new period of tense silence was suddenly broken by the quick patter of swiftly running feet below the garden wall. Brusquely the priest swung round towards the window, and recoiled again with a cry of absolute horror.

"Fäik!" he said, rushing towards the door, "Fäik!"

## CHAPTER XIX

Why should it not avail to bless or curse?

The world streams forth her passions on the air,  
May we not draw the pure waves or the worse  
Down in one flaming moment, that shall bear  
A fearsome blight, or else a foison fair  
To future years? Oh, by th' unyielding Will  
All earthly things are wrought: who then may dare  
Deny it power in one o'erleaping thrill  
Though 'twere to move an Alp, to be accomplished still.

M. M.

THE thing had happened so quickly that none of the others had even time to change their respective positions before the priest disappeared, closing the door after him. A minute perhaps passed thus; then Pierrek slowly turned towards that heavy closed door, listening.

The breeze was whispering gently amid the leaves outside, and the whole world was brightening every instant more and more, for the warm morning air was dissolving the last delicate webs of the night's mist. On her knees in a corner Mari-Gwezek had wrapped herself in her orisons like a chrysalis in its cocoon. She did not know as yet the full horror of this unparalleled situation . . . dreading in fact for the immediate future Lanäik's anguish far more than Fäik's, who, after all, though certainly startled when the truth would be told to her, would, as she thought, still be Pierrek's wife whether he were a Rouzik or somebody else! Pierrek looked at her once or twice, the lowering brow and angry frown

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recalling to him in that strange chaotic fashion that follows great emotional stress, and jostles one's thoughts past and present into a bewildering jumble, a day when he had discovered her shaking a statue of St. Hervé—a very ancient treasure of the Curé's that occupied a bower in the garden—by the shoulders with the utmost violence. He had rushed to the rescue, fearing to see it totter from its pedestal, but Mari-Gwezek had soon sent him about his business. "Don't you come interfering with my prayers," she had said, naïvely. "I'm going to show this stubborn St. Hervé what he gets for not listening to me!"

Just what effect would her wrestlings with heaven have now? he wondered dimly.

And Madame Koäder . . . what of her? Buried beneath the ruins of all her hopes; bruised and battered by the ghastly débris that she had wantonly pulled down upon herself, she crouched in a sort of stunned apathy, almost incapable of further thought, feeling nothing, except that she seemed to be separated now from everything worth living for by a blank, blind, impassable wall. Then all of a sudden her throat muscles contracted, and for a hideous second she did not know whether she was going to laugh or cry, and falling on her knees before M. Kornog's prayer-stool, she began doing both, in a smothered, inarticulate fashion that was horrible to hear.

"Sh-sh-h-h, be quiet!" Pierrek said, fiercely, remembering by some unwelcome trick of the brain Gouillas' performances a few hours earlier, and in sudden overpowering restlessness he began to pace up and down the room, with the foot that bore the little starry cicatrice still unshod.

Ah, that cry!—that was what half-consciously he had

been waiting for! From somewhere in the garden it cut the quiet air, short and sharp, with a supreme intensity of fury—and something else besides that made Pierrek shiver with a horror of wonder and despair. "I cannot . . . I cannot," he cried, and pushing back a chair that fell with a crash to the ground, he reached the window at a bound, placed one hand on the sill, and vaulted to the flagged path below.

"What did he say?—what did he say?" Mari-Gwezek exclaimed, jumping up from her knees, and Koäder, raising her swollen, tear-smeared face from the *prie-Dieu*, clutched the old woman's dress, and dragging her down, whispered in her ear what she did not trust herself to tell aloud.

Her little brown hands uplifted, her thin fingers working as if they strove to strangle an invisible something in mid-air, Mari-Gwezek stumbled back, and then, her face convulsed with excitement, she rushed towards the door, but before she could open it, it flew back with a violence that sent the glass of a large water-color picture hanging just behind showering in a thousand tinkling pieces upon the floor, and Fäik ran into the room, followed by the entreating, expostulating priest.

"Where is Pierrek?" she cried, in a strange, hoarse key, her teeth knocking together with a little, continuous click. "Where is Pierrek?"

"Be quiet, my little dove, be quiet!" poor Mari-Gwezek interposed, with tears pouring down her old cheeks, but Fäik did not even hear her. Her eyes were alive with a light that it was not good to see, and with a mechanical regularity maddening to watch, she kept pushing the little, red-gold curls back against her coiffe.

"He is hiding," she continued, peering in every corner of the large, low room—"hiding, hiding from me . . . he

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does not think that I will let him . . . hide!" And then she suddenly became aware of Koäder's presence, though the latter had instinctively sought the protection of the darkest corner, where she stood cowering in abject terror, one arm raised apprehensively before her ashen face.

With a savage execration Fäik turned on her. "Oh! don't be afraid . . . I am not going to strike you . . . I can hurt you more . . . otherwise!" She searched the other's face with cruel deliberation, and then, seizing her roughly by the arm, dragged her forward in the full light of a window.

"You have done this"—there came a curious catch in the low, grating voice—"this abomination, Koäder Le Hurec, to separate him from me . . . as you think, forever! Now, hear me! I don't believe what you said, but neither do I care whether it is true or not, he is mine, and will remain mine . . . forever and ever. . . . I fear nothing, I am not a coward, and half of all the evil you brought on him to-day, I take, whatever else happens . . . but you!"—she paused the mere space of one deep breath, and as she dropped Koäder's arm and stepped back, the light in her eyes was one of baleful inspiration—"you"—one rounded arm from which the wide sleeve fell back pointed to the shaking, white-faced woman—"you will never have a chance to forget what you have done to me, for from this hour the change will come upon you that I am calling for—little by little and creepingly, so that you can watch it! Oh! you can moan," she continued, with a fierce curl of her short upper lip, "and moan you shall, for the rest of your days! In sleeping and waking you shall cry for help to God above and the devil below, but neither will help you; disease and disfigurement shall twist you in agony, and no relief shall you find! You shall be humbled be-

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fore the humblest, and trodden under foot by the meanest. Rest you never shall, neither by day nor by night. Hideous and repulsive shall you be in the eyes of all, and your husband's love shall go from you. Children you shall never bear . . . and all too slowly for your desire shall death crawl your way. Cursed, cursed, cursed in this life, cursed, cursed, cursed in the next and forever . . . since death for such as you shall never come, neither in this world nor in the next . . . and your flesh shall rot away, your bones shall crumble, but your spirit shall live on and on, accursed without end!"

"Fäik, for pity's sake!" the horrified priest implored. He did not dare to touch her, for fear of seeing her drop dead at his feet, her heart split by the violence of her fury. "Fäik!"

The perspiration was running in streams on Koäder's lifeless face, glazing it like that of a corpse beneath the ice-dripping faucets of the Morgue. Slowly she sank to her knees, swinging to and fro like some ghastly sentient pendulum, and all at once she slid forward in a limp, shapeless heap, with a leaden thud of her forehead against the bare boards.

\* \* \* \* \*

Late that night M. Kornog was walking backward and forward in his garden like a sentry on duty, pausing every little while to listen. The silence was peculiarly intense, for there was no wind, and in the valley below the very trees and shrubs were for once strangely motionless. Again and again the priest peered down the dark gulf, repeating to himself in encouragement the message a boy had brought him hours before: "Tell Monsieur le Recteur that I shall come to him before midnight," and the keen eyes searched the path gleaming

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faintly white amid the dense verdure of the slope. The keen ears listened in vain to every smallest sound.

"Where can he be?" the poor Curé thought, staring across the vast, night-veiled bay, his square chin thrust forward, his resolute lips pressed tightly together, every nerve on the alert, strung with the tension of the last eighteen hours. At length he heard the soft tread of unshod feet approaching from the cemetery side, and he drew a long breath of relief.

"Pierrek?" he asked, softly, almost in a whisper.

"Yes, Pierrek!" the answer came, in the same guarded tones, and without another word they met.

M. Kornog silently led the way to his house, opened the door, and preceded his visitor, not into the study, but into his own simply furnished bedroom, the most isolated and peaceful corner of this quiet dwelling. He drew forward a chair for Pierrek, and then himself sat down, with that square slowness of movement which seems part and parcel of those men who deal exclusively with active life, and for a moment gazed fixedly at the veiled lamp on the table, scarcely trusting himself to look at Pierrek, even in this dim light. Twice he made a little movement of the lips, holding them tightly between his teeth as he was wont to do during moments of suspense and great anxiety, and it was Pierrek who spoke first.

"Do not grieve for me, Monsieur le Recteur," he said, quietly, taking M. Kornog entirely by surprise. "You will have enough trouble after I am gone, without worrying about me!"

His splendid gray eyes were waiting for his old friend's with a peculiar glow in their depths which the Curé recognized at once. He had seen it there before on one or two occasions, and heroism cannot pass unobserved. Pierrek,



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he knew, was quite simple and honest in what he said. He did not want to personally cause more pain than he had already innocently done, so this once made clear, he turned to another topic.

"I have come to tell you that I am going away in two hours, never to come back here again!" His eyes had become fixed on some far away imaginary point, and he spoke now like one talking in his dreams. The drawn face looked oddly colorless in that dim lamp-shine, but was surprisingly calm; far more so than the Curé's, upon whom the awful experiences of that day had told far more than he cared to let any one see. Which is why he kept the lamp turned down.

"Where will you go, Pierrek?"

His lips again closed upon the question with a queer distressed little tremor. He dreaded the reply, and did not even glance at Pierrek. Also, he was thinking of the long summer days, the long winter evenings that would drearily succeed each other in an endless procession for those left behind, hopeless, aimless, useless—filled with unmerited, but bitter and enduring shame.

The young man made a hesitating little movement with his right hand, and leaned forward in his chair.

"To Cochín-China," he said, at last. "They always need crow bait there!" His steady eyes suddenly blazed with fierce excitement. "It is the only thing I can do!" he said, speaking very quickly. "I cannot see her again. . . ." His teeth shut down for a second before he resumed. "The shame to her is too great already. Now that I know that she too knows, I cannot see her again. I would have killed myself at once this morning, but I knew that it would make it worse for her. Like this she will have time to . . . to get used to it. I wandered around among the high rocks all day, and at sun-

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down, resting for a moment behind a coast-guard's *guérite*,<sup>1</sup> I heard those two new ones from Lorient talking together. They've been there and come back . . . I—won't! But never mind that. It was a bit of luck my hearing what they said!" Then catching a gesture of protest from the priest, and misunderstanding it, he continued, hurriedly: "Oh! they spoke grandly of the service . . . they . . . said that nowhere in the world is there a navy like ours . . . and all the ships are manned by Bretons, or nearly all . . . and even the *Saozons*<sup>2</sup> are nowhere when we come, it appears. So you see, Monsieur le Recteur, that—you needn't pity me—much!"

The Curé was looking now at Pierrek with singularly bright eyes, for there was something in the young man's attitude which gave the impression of assured strength and unquenchable courage, yet M. Kornog's great heart was aching with a hitherto unknown sharpness of pain; pain which he could not and would not show.

"They spoke the truth!" he said, relieved to find himself for an instant on the safe ground of commonplaces. "I heard an admiral once say that we Bretons are the backbone of the navy—and it seems that our vessels, too, are superior to any others afloat!"

"Carry more guns than the *Saozons*, and more men," quoted Pierrek, almost mechanically, "so those coast-guards said. Steam faster in a heavy sea, too, and being mostly larger, can shoot straighter!"<sup>3</sup>

Both men had been marking time by the aid of this conversational intermezzo. Both equally dreaded what there remained to discuss, to arrange, to agree upon, and

<sup>1</sup> Watch hut.

<sup>2</sup> The English.

<sup>3</sup> The truth of the above statements can be ascertained by glancing at *Brassey's Annual*, or any other reliable naval authority.

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now they sat quite still, until suddenly Pierrek broke into a short laugh, that stopped with sickening abruptness.

"I hid in those rocks to-day," he said, "planning murder at first. That woman . . . O Christ . . . she deserves it . . . I mean, to be broken in two, like a rotten stick of wood!"

"That woman will get her punishment without your help!" the priest said, with bitter conviction . . . and in a different tone, hesitating a little as he spoke, he continued: "Will you . . . will you say good-bye . . . to them—your mother, and . . . Fäik?"

"My mother . . . and my . . . wife!"

The bravely sustained effort to steady the voice became powerless there, and he paused again, grinding his teeth. "Yes," he resumed at last, "my mother . . . a total stranger to me . . . and my wife . . . !" With a blasphemy that the priest did not even notice, he rose and smote his fist upon the table. "Is this just? . . . Is it just to her . . . I won't speak of myself . . . although I too am innocent, God knows! I am a man and can bear all . . . but she, what has she done to be pointed out as a criminal . . . she and her children with her. . . . You know us here; nobody will ever say a decent word to her again, and scorn and shame and contempt, that's what she'll have to endure forever! . . . my Fäik . . . she and the little ones, and even you, Monsieur le Recteur, even her high and mighty uncle will be unable to protect her from these cruelties! My mother . . . I must still call her that, I can't help it . . . will die or go mad as Mari-Gwezek said this morning . . . and that's the best thing that can happen to her, but . . . she, Fäik . . . what can she do, where can she go, tell me that, Monsieur le Recteur? You know as well as I do that there is not a

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spot from here to the very ends of Brittany where she can hide from this . . . this . . . !”

He broke off, breathing hard, and M. Kornog rose. There were tears in his eyes, and his mouth opened twice before he could control himself sufficiently to speak.

“It is hard and unjust, and cruel . . . horribly cruel . . .” he said at last, “and undeserved as well, for the only culprit is myself. No, don’t speak, Pierrek, it is no use! Twenty-two years ago I connived in a lie. I . . . believing it to be my duty, gave sanction to a substitution that in itself seemed then quite harmless, but was none the less a crime. I saved a woman’s reason by so doing . . . perhaps . . . but is she not more completely doomed now, and, with her, four wretched beings who also had a right to their honest places beneath God’s heaven. I yielded to a man’s entreaties, a man pleading for his wife’s life . . . his wife’s tottering mind. . . . I thought my duty was sufficiently accomplished by inquiring right and left for a missing infant, and then went quietly home to take up my daily task. And see now, who is it that suffers for the shepherd’s laxity . . . the sheep, the poor blind sheep who should have been led otherwise . . . led in the right path instead of the wrong!”

“No, no — don’t say that, Monsieur le Recteur!” Pierrek implored, cut to the heart by M. Kornog’s profound distress. “You did your duty then, as you have always done towards us all! Never was there such a friend as you, and it is only because I leave Fäik in your care that I haven’t put an end to all of us—I mean Fäik, myself, and the children, too, this very day!” The sweat stood on his forehead, for at that instant he seemed to hear once more that terrible cry of Fäik! In a couple of swift strides he crossed over to the window

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and leaned out. It was almost a shock to him to find everything so quiet, the cool night air softly caressing the ivy-leaves beneath the sill, and the great border of white carnations feather-like and a little ghostly in the transparent star-lit dusk. Beyond the cliffs the sea could be faintly heard, rolling ever so gently upon the pebbly beach, the soft breeze sporting above it with the skirts of the darkness, and again he seemed to hear that cry. Was it going to haunt him like that forever now, piercing him each time to the very soul—that cry with its quivering undertone of despair and of eternal reproach?

Noiselessly M. Kornog had followed him, and suddenly he put an arm about his shoulders, drawing him firmly back into the room.

“Courage, Pierrek,” he said. “We need a great deal of it to-night, both you and I—for I, too, have a heavy cross to bear! I have loved you like a son, my boy, and now we must part—perhaps forever. Remember that I will care for Fäik, for her children, and for Lanäik, as long as life lasts. They will always come first with me—before all else.”

For an instant the two men looked down into each other's souls, and Pierrek saw the priest's eyes soften into such a wonderful grief and tenderness that his heart melted for the first time that day, and falling on one knee he buried his face in the black folds of the *soutane*, weeping like a child. Not a word did M. Kornog utter at first, but his folded hands rested on the bowed head, and his lips moved faintly. Presently he bent down and began whispering very low. Gradually the terrible sobs slackened and then ceased. Pierrek was listening, listening—and as he listened he seemed to see the bitter, cruel present recede as though his journey had

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already begun, and he was looking back upon those left behind, in good hands. What he heard was not of earth, or of this world at all, and just then it was the only thing he could have borne.

## CHAPTER XX

Lord of the Mist upon the sea,  
Lord of the Sea from shore to shore,  
We know Thy veil of mystery,  
We know Thy waves, and nothing more.

We hear Thy surges spouting loud  
On hidden reefs when winds are still,  
And though we quiver in the cloud,  
We know them servants to Thy will.

The fringes of Thy mantle are  
A pall of dread to such as we,  
O draw them with Thy hand afar,  
Give us more oft a smiling sea!

Crush not our little strength and frail!  
Hast Thou not framed us every one?  
Loose forth again Thy clearing gale,  
Shine out once more Thy quickening sun!

Flamed from whose glory we shall view  
The heavens upborne upon one span,  
And Faith resurgent nerve anew  
The arm to strive, the brain to plan.

And when upon their final sleep  
The billows sink at Thy behest,  
To us the toilers of Thy deep  
Grant, Lord of All, eternal rest!

*O Domine Nebularum.*—M. M.

SEA and sky were all a-tangle in the soft meshes of a silver-gray mist—*comme en Bretagne*—a pearly fog veiling the shifting floors of water beneath, and filling the

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atmosphere about the armored cruiser *Magicienne*, with scarf upon scarf of gauze that strayed lazily hither and thither before melting finally into the great nothingness of beyond.

Swiftly the *Magicienne* ran in spite of it, for in front of her stretched nothing now save empty, stupendous solitudes. Long since had the crouching lion of Gibraltar, the rocky headlands of Sicily and the oily, warm waters of the Red Sea been left behind. In her wake the thin white scarfs sagged down a-top of those smooth, regular undulations that gently rocked the huge vessel—broad gleaming backs, sleek and gray as glass, that shouldered one another beneath her shearing keel, and let her glide with the same eternal regularity of motion from whispering slope to whispering slope.

Overhead the trade-winds were just beginning to murmur to the rigging that melancholy little song of theirs that sounds as mournful and ethereal as though the chords of some great æolian-harp were being continually caressed by an especially tender touch. All notion of time would have seemed a thing forgotten, had it not been for the half-hourly slow rhythm of the look-out's call away out for'ard. Behind the meteor-trail of white gauziness following the ship the mist ceaselessly reformed into indolent volutes, imponderate, and yet opaque to the eye, like the shivering white curtain in front.

Silent and indifferent Pierrek watched these tender gray vapors from the cross-trees—his assigned perch as *gabier de misaine*. He did not know the spot where once more his foot would touch solid earth—sailors are not told such things beforehand—and little did he care! There or thereabouts . . . what mattered . . . since return he never would!



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His grave, gray eyes turned occasionally to the bowsprit, always forging ahead, with its two small horns, like slender antennæ, gracefully fretting the skin of each silky surge, its neat profile recalling a sternly bent cross-bow, pointing towards the Infinite; but more often yet did he gaze back upon the invisible point of the wide horizon where he divined his Brittany, and slowly then he would make a furtive sign of the cross . . . corrected at once by a faint smile—to dispel presentiments!

He lived up there in the "tops," from which he rarely came down of his own accord. There he kept his treasures, Fäik's picture and Arzel's, Lanäik's and Tamek's—a little silver crucifix bought at the first *Pardon* after his marriage—a rosary given to him at the parting minute by M. Kornog—and that bannerette of delicate white and green whereon the triumphant head of Ahès was traced—together with two or three other things that were to him all the past.

From this tiny refuge he saw the snowy deck of the *Magicienne* slanting and swinging in her onward race like some monstrous flying-fish of extraordinary whiteness, and to-day amid all the shifting grayness that submerged the world, he glanced more often than usual with a passing smile—his old contemptuous one this time—at the slim streak of gleaming black—a mere pencil scratch on a white sheet—following the ship, and shaped like it, that was its ever-attending shark!

It, too, like Pierrek, waited, waited always, rising and falling like the great ship, and like her coming down into the seas with a clear sickle-like swoop, but *entre deux eaux*, with behind that relentless, unwearying pursuit the gray mist monotonously shutting down, slowly and silently, as a shroud.

And for Pierrek to-day was like yesterday, to-morrow

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would be like to-day, the lapses of the hours succeeding each other inexorably; until the great gray mist that closes at last over us all should fold its pitying wings mercifully around him.

THE END





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